

SCHOOL-SITE ORGANIZING TOOLKIT:



M This is a living document that will grow and adapt as we organize and experiment together. To use this toolkit, come to an <u>upcoming cohort meeting</u>. Questions? <u>Send us a note</u>.

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🎨 Header artwork by Ryan Clayton, mbathio m, Ness, Nico, Nickyy, Nømad, and Obad.





INTRODUCTION

If you are a public school student, educator, or caregiver who wants your school to end policing practices and build Restorative Justice, this toolkit is for you.

Whether you are brand new to organizing or well on your way, in these pages you will find strategies, tips, wisdom, and resources that you can use to push for changes at your school.

The pages to follow draw from years of organizing and are the result of 100+ conversations between NYC public school community members. Whether you jump around or read it all the way through, we invite you to use what you need.

This toolkit was made by and for students, educators, and caregivers collaborating together, and is meant to be used in community with others. We hold monthly borough-based meet-ups led by students and educators to do just that.

<u>Join us at the next cohort meeting in your borough.</u>

Have you tried and tested an organizing strategy at your school that you want to share? <u>Send us a note</u>. This is a living tool that will grow and change as we continue to learn and practice.

We know we can't rely on politicians to create the changes our schools need to truly support and uplift young people. It'll take educators, students, and families working together making changes school by school, borough by borough. That's what this toolkit is about, and that's why it's in your hands.





DEAR STUDENTS OF NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS,

We, the students, are the community of any school. We all know, of course, that without us there is no school.

We write this letter today with certain values in mind. We believe in community, spirit, accountability, and diversity and we believe students are the center of all those values.

The toolkit covers three problems: policing, lack of resources, and decision making that excludes students. Students, you can read and learn from this toolkit to make changes at your school. If you're reading this, we know you can help.

We believe we should all be able to feel safe at school and get the education we need without limitation. The education system should be held accountable to ensure that all students are given equal opportunities and protect students' rights.

This toolkit invites you to get involved in education justice organizing work. To us, education justice means school respects the dignity and rights of students, school respects student ideas and thoughts, and all schools are held accountable for providing opportunity to all students.

We believe in freedom for students and we believe in safety. Some try to convince us that those are opposites. That is why we do this work.

We are writing this letter to introduce the toolkit and right from the beginning address the concerning issue of policing in NYC public schools.

Personally, we all attend a Bronx school with scanning measures, where we feel more judged and violated than safe – constantly under the watchful eye of school security. Each day, tens of thousands of students pass through metal detectors in New York City schools. This is an inherent injustice. There's no question that the scanning process is a major infringement on students' safety and dignity.





Of course, scanning is not the sole problem we see.

Schools impose rigid rules and intense inflexible academic expectations, we've seen students penalized for being just a minute late to class. It should be simple. No student should be rushed to the point of running to avoid detention. By working with teachers and making demands of our schools, we can begin to change these kinds of rules.

We can learn from each other.

We invite you to take action.

Your Friends,

Brandon, Godson, Sanjidah, Chris New York City Public School Students Toolkit Team Members





DEAR NYC PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATORS,

Thank you for picking up this toolkit and taking the time to read our letter. As four NYC public school educators who span K-12 education, we bring a variety of experiences from different educational stages. While we are white women, along with 54% of educators in the New York City Public Schools, we are acutely aware of the stark contrast with the student body, where 85% identify as youth of color.¹ This disparity in representation is not just a statistic – it is inequity by design and reflects deeper systemic issues within our education system and municipal labor force.

Understanding and acknowledging the reality of white supremacy is a critical step towards creating a society rooted in equity. It is in this context that our work in Restorative and Transformative Justice begins. We are inspired by the legacies of Black women, Indigenous cultures, and Transformative Justice practitioners, and united by shared values of creativity, imagination, healing, joy, and the pursuit of collective liberation. We are dedicated to nurturing environments where every member of our community can thrive. Central to our mission is dismantling and removing all structural barriers in our students' paths – namely refusing to take part in, and actively working to abolish unjust policies and the school-to-prison pipeline.

We are witnessing unprecedented attacks on public education. In the face of state violence, censorship, and erasure, now is the time to reclaim our power to create healthy, transformative environments where we are accountable to each other.

We hope to center not only our hearts, but the hearts and feelings of all our community members. This toolkit is a collection of stories. And while these stories may be from different positions, different neighborhoods, different school contexts & different levels of administration and family support, what you'll also notice is that they are all connected by the collective effort. Whether or not these organizers felt successful in their story, they constantly reflect on the collective — how many people were involved? How strong were the relationships? Who else could we have brought in?

https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/government-reports/report-on-school-based-staff-demographics



¹ Find data through *NYC Open Data* here:



Even when organizers do not succeed in achieving their goal, their work bears lessons and knowledge that can be just as, and sometimes more, valuable than what we learn from success stories.

As we read these stories and reflect on our past and our present, we use these lessons to shape the future of our schools.

And as educators, we do not work alone — be it in our classrooms, in our schools, in our districts, or even across the city. We work alongside young people who know what kind of world they want to live in; they know what's "fair" and they deeply understand what it means to equitably support and care for our neighbors. However, these spaces and relationships are constantly at risk, as educators, we are called to make sure these sacred spaces and relationships are protected.

And in that work, something that is tricky about NYC is its massive size — this can sometimes feel overwhelming and can make us feel small. But at the same time, the size of our city, and the size of NYCPS bring us countless stories of success — some small, but some pretty massive. And while these stories may seem isolated, what we love about this toolkit is that it brings them together and it makes our work feel that much more possible.

We hope that as you read these stories, no matter where you teach or where your school is in its RJ and TJ journey, you are filled with hope and provided with tools to make you feel powerful and successful. As abolitionist, organizer and Transformative Justice practitioner, Mariame Kaba says, "Nothing that we do that is worthwhile is done alone."

With Gratitude & Solidarity,

Gabriella, Ilona, Jen, Madeline New York City Public School Educators Toolkit Team Members





DEAR NYC PUBLIC SCHOOL PARENTS & CAREGIVERS,

I'm a mom of two NYC public school students. As I write this, they are in 6th and 8th grade. When they were entering elementary school I had a lot of ideas, too many ideas, of what I would accomplish in their schools with my professional and political experience in education justice organizing.

While I've served as an elected and volunteer parent leader, not one of my daydreams actually came true. As much as I have learned, and as much as I've had my original ideas challenged, my underlying conviction hasn't changed at all: **public education belongs to the public**. We are responsible for public schools, and the system is accountable to us. It's up to us to shape the school system and push it to work for our communities.

So many parents are scared to "bother" school staff, but who else is going to advocate for your child? Who are you waiting for to fight for your baby the way you will? I believe that parents should get involved in Parent Associations (PAs) and School Leadership Teams (SLTs), not only because you will improve the school for your child, and for every child, but because of the model you will set for your child. When you step up as a leader or volunteer you are telling your child, "You are the solution to the problems you see. You are a valuable part of your community."

The biggest challenge I've found to actualizing my hopes for parent leadership is the lack of time to build relationships with parents who also want to contribute new opinions, ideas, and energy. To change systems, parents have to work together, and never alone. PAs and SLTs are places where parents and staff have equal voice; they should not be composed of parents and teachers cowering in fear of falling out of favor with their principal. And yet, that is often the case, and it can be deeply-felt.





I consider my family extraordinarily lucky that our neighborhood has excellent progressive schools. I feel that my children are safe at school because all identities are valued and respected. I can trust the caring staff of their school to help them learn from their mistakes, and bring students in closer when they're struggling, rather than shame them. I am fully aware of what a privilege it is to be able to describe this experience with schools. My sons have learned about human rights, oppression, colonialism, and so many historic and current realities that are considered controversial to teach in other parts of the country. They have learned about these topics through field trips, interviews, hands-on investigation, creative arts, as well as reading, discussion, and writing reflection.

While this kind of pedagogy, curriculum, and approach is embraced by a very diverse group of families, I have found that the culture of parent (and educator) leadership in this type of small, non-traditional school is quite compliant. The eagerness to sustain the specialness of a small school can translate to a passivity that you might not find at a larger traditional school that's been serving its neighborhood for, perhaps, a century. My sense is that parents in those schools understand their entitlement; they are part of the school's *governance*. The system of democracy for that school and community may have been in place for a long time, while the small, progressive school is more likely to be new, and the checks and balances that allow for equity and voice are viewed as archaic or bureaucratic.

Schools should encourage parents to lead. In NYC, mayors have had to seek waivers from the U.S. Justice Department to enact mayoral control; removing an electoral leadership development pipeline for parents of color is in violation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. That pipeline historically offered Black and Brown parents experience that encouraged their participation in other elected positions in the community.

I am proud to say that I serve on my sons' school SLT now. I plan on working with parents and staff to set goals for our school, and ensure that we have the resources to reach those goals. I'm so grateful to have this toolkit to support that work, as well as the knowledge that if you're reading this that you're out there doing the same.

In Solidarity,

Sally New York City Public School Parent Founder of Teachers Unite





<u>STEPS TO ORGANIZE</u> Your school

Overview -

Grassroots organizing seeks to gather and empower communities towards a common goal. In this section, we take a look at general steps and approaches that you can apply to any organizing goal. Use this as your starting point.

The most important tool we have in organizing is our relationships. As you read this, start thinking about the relationships you have at your school and how you can lean into those to get things done. As Margaret Wheatley stated, "We never know how our small activities will affect others through the invisible fabric of our connectedness. In this exquisitely connected world, it's never a question of critical mass. It's always about critical connections." Those critical connections will help to drive your work, not outward as some may believe, but deep into the roots of your soil.

Steps To Follow -

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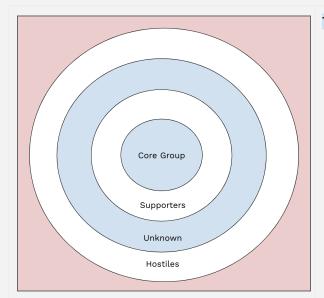


STEP 1: GET PEOPLE INVOLVED

"First step in thinking about organizing is having a base. It doesn't have to be a specific group that meets about a particular issue. It could be different groups: GSA, Young TJ group, student council. These groups have different goals in mind, but all work towards collective liberation... It seems like it's not really connected, but these are all things that students want. GSA is not directly related to climate change. But whenever there is a group of students organizing around whatever, I promise there will be at least one person interested."

- Youth Organizers

Whether you want to build restorative practices in your school community or resist policing, start by considering: who are the people who already share the same ideas and feelings? It could be anyone. Starting a core group can be as small as two people.



*Bullseye diagram inspired from Labor Notes Secrets of a Successful Organizer.

Think of your efforts as a bullseye –

→ The Core

This is you and those who are just as activated to organize for restorative practices in your school.

→ Supporters

These are the people who are like-minded but may not be activated yet. The idea is to bring them into the core.

→ Unknown

A majority of your school community falls in this category. The work of the core will be to assess and bring in folks who are interested in building the center.

→ Hostiles

There may be a small number of people who are hostile to the idea of RJ. Don't waste your time and energy trying to convince them. Hopefully, over time, they will come around.



STEP 2: ASSESS YOUR SCHOOL & IDENTIFY DECISION-MAKERS

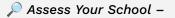
With your core, discuss what you notice about the dynamics in your school. Name the questions you need answers to.

- → What is the process for getting a budget decision to hire an RJ coordinator?
- → What restorative practices does our school already have in place? Is it based on individual teachers or are there schoolwide practices? What more could we be doing as a community? Do you know of other schools with models you'd like to replicate?
- → Map your school; literally. Who are the supporters? Who is hostile to RJ? Who are the people you're not sure of?
- → Who has the power to make decisions in your school? What is the decision-making process that applies to your goal?
- → What other questions does your core have?

Depending on what your priority is, research/assess relevant info:

- → For anything that requires school funding, like hiring a new staff position, <u>look</u> <u>at the school budget</u>.
- → To make your school more restorative, look at <u>Teachers Unite's School Climate</u> and <u>Culture Rubric</u>.
- → You can use NYCoRE's <u>Anti-Racist Schools Rubric</u> to assess your school's decision-making structure, curriculum, culture & discipline, and more.





Understand How Your School Spends Money

You can find your school's budget by going to the DOE's <u>Galaxy Budget</u> <u>Summaries</u> and entering your school's 4 digit code.

Where a school spends their money should reflect their educational philosophy. For example, in a school that values sports, you might see more money spent on physical education teachers. As such, one way to approach the budget is to look for patterns in the spending. Does this match stated educational values?

Salaries are usually pretty steady. Don't focus on those numbers, but you may want to focus on which positions are funded, and which positions are not funded. There is some discretion there.

Focus on the bottom that says "OTPS". This stands for "other than personnel services." This is money that the admin can spend with more discretion; it's what gets used for consultants and contracts. As such, we can have more input there.

"As teachers, we could ask the principal where money is going, but if we had the Parent Association asking as well, that'd be more accountability"

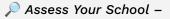
- Educator, Chapter Leader

The DOE provides principals with budget allocations along the following timeline –

- → January: Schools get initial enrollment estimates
- → Early June: Schools receive initial allocations based on projected enrollment
- → Over Summer: Budget Planning/Schools can appeal their enrollment estimates
- → October 31: School register enrollment numbers are recorded
- → November: First mid-year budget adjustment is made
- → February: Final mid-year budget adjustment is made

Check out the "<u>Demystifying School Budgets</u>" series by the Independent Budget Office for more background.





Leverage Your School Leadership Team

Every school has a School Leadership Team (SLT) made up of parents, teachers, students (in high schools), and admin. Each year, the SLT works to identify goals for the school, strategies to meet those goals, and ways to align the school budget to those goals. According to Chancellor's Regulation B-801 "School-Based Budgeting," the principal shall consult with the SLT when creating the proposed school-based budget. These are written up in the annual Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP).

You can see which goals are included in your school's CEP by going to the <u>DOE iPlan</u> <u>Portal</u> and selecting your school from the drop down menu. SLTs have the power to set goals to do things like increase diversity at the school, reduce suspensions, change homework policies, improve classroom spaces, and more. If you want changes like these at your school, but they aren't included in the CEP, you might consider joining the SLT to push for these goals to be included next year. That can set the groundwork for hiring restorative positions and other changes that move your school's culture and practices away from policing and towards Restorative Justice.

The CEP for each year should be posted by the end of November. If you don't see it there, you can speak to your principal, chapter leader, or PTA president to request a copy. These three people are all members of your school's SLT.

🧭 Jump to examples of the changes you can make by leveraging your SLT –

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In cases where there isn't yet principal buy-in, SLT members can reach a consensus when they disagree with the principal's justification that the school-based budget is aligned with the CEP, and that the principal's proposed budget is inconsistent with the goals and policies set forth in the CEP. See <u>Chancellor's Regulation A-655</u> for more details on the dispute process.

Check out "<u>Schools Are Us</u>" for more information about SLTs and how they relate to all the levels of school decision making in New York City.

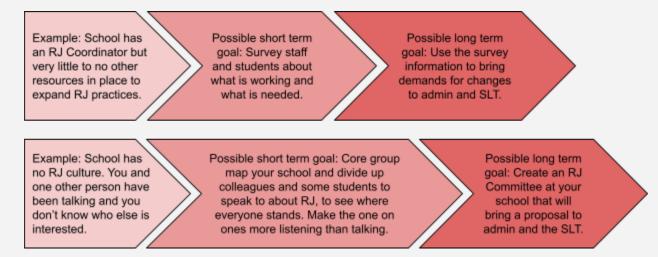




STEP 3: IDENTIFY GOALS

The goals you choose will depend on the context of your school. Once your core group has assessed (1) what decisions have been made, (2) who really makes the decisions, and (3) what decisions need changing or need to be introduced—it's time to set your goals. The important thing is to work with your core group to make these decisions together.

Here are a couple of possibilities -



During this time, consider what barriers might be holding people back from being all-in on RJ. Knowing these barriers can help you plan to overcome them, which you'll need to do to build a strong enough base to effectively accomplish your goals.

Often, there is an assumption that people are apathetic or that they have ideas about school discipline that are rooted in a deeply held belief that rewards and consequences motivate behavior. There is only one way to find out why someone might be apathetic or not fully on board, and that is through one-on-one conversations.

What is holding people back? Is there a fear of not having control of the classroom? Is it confusion about what motivates behavior OR around what restorative practices actually are? Is it hopelessness that change will never happen? As an organizer at your school, our job is to find out what is holding people back so we can make a plan for how to bring them along.





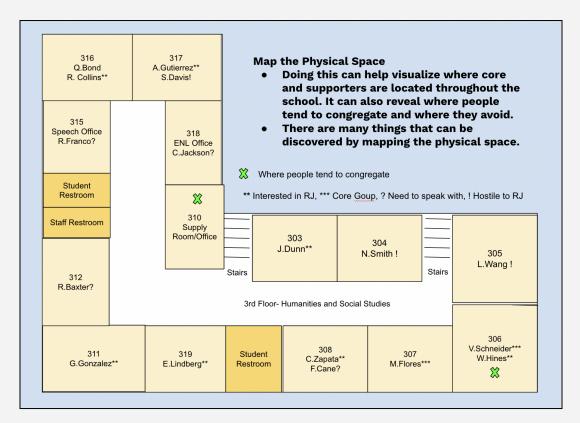
STEP 4: WORK OF THE TEAM

Once your core group has done some groundwork and has hopefully grown to include more people from your school community, develop some loose structures and agreements for how you will work together.

- → When and how often will your group meet? Set up a regular time and place.
- → What kinds of activities can you do to get to know each other better?
- → How will you share the roles of facilitating and other tasks?
- → How will your group communicate with each other?
- → What norms will you establish? What will you do if there is a disagreement?
- → How will you document your work together (note-taking)?
- → Establish other community needs...

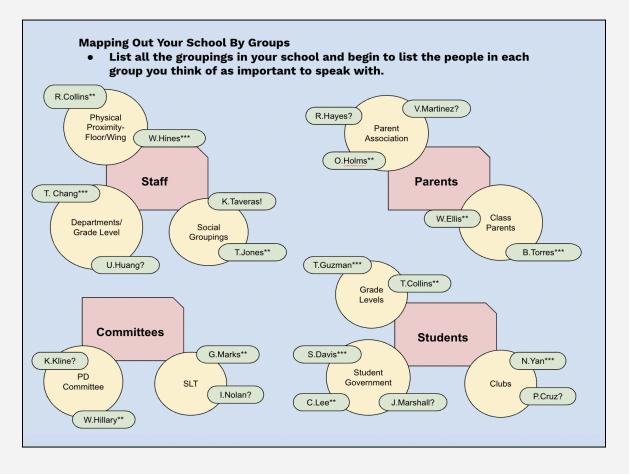
Map Your School Community –

An important activity to do with your core group is to *literally* map out your school.









When mapping your school community, label where people are, create symbols for how they align with RJ work, note the people you haven't spoken to yet, etc.

With the information, create a chart with headings that your core group keeps track of. Decide as a group which people you will reach out to, and make a plan for who will reach out to whom.

Department	Contact	RJ Support Level	Attended "What is RJ?" Meeting
Speech	R.Franco@email.com	?	No
9th Grade Humanities	Bond213@email.com	?	Yes
11th Grade History	TChang@email.com	**	Yes
P.A. Co-President	Holmes489@email.com	**	Yes
SLT Parent Member	I.Nolan@email.com	?	No
	** supporter	***core aroup 2 Need	to connect I Hostile
	Speech 9th Grade Humanities 11th Grade History P.A. Co-President	SpeechR.Franco@email.com9th Grade HumanitiesBond213@email.com11th Grade HistoryTChang@email.comPA. Co-PresidentHolmes489@email.comSLT Parent MemberI.Nolan@email.com	Speech R.Franco@email.com ? 9th Grade Humanities Bond213@email.com ? 11th Grade History TChang@email.com ** PA. Co-President Holmes489@email.com **





STEP 5: CREATE AN ORGANIZING PLAN

Draw on the experiences of your group to organize a plan for achieving your goals and demands. A major part of creating an organizing plan is creating and maintaining democratic processes within your group.

Organizing a plan has three main parts –

1 What are the demands?

2 Who has the power to fix the problem?

3 What actions can we take that will work?

This is example of how an organized group might lay out a plan to get demands met -

→ What are the demands?

Your group has decided that you need funding for an RJ coordinator at your school. Your group has done the research and there is funding, as well as schoolwide CEP goals that includes "engaging students in fostering a more positive school climate." Your group has brainstormed and outlined a proposal for the role of the RJ coordinator, as well as structures and processes for how RJ practices could work at your school.

→ Who has the power to fix the problem?

Your group has identified the principal as the main decision maker, and you discovered that the SLT is the space where staff, parents, and students can discuss and bring proposals.

→ What actions can we take that will work?

Your group brainstormed actions and created a timeline. To build a base, you plan to start surveying school community members in the fall and hold an informational event by the beginning of October. By November, you plan to have a proposal and petition to present to the SLT. If that does not sway decision makers, you plan to follow up with letter writing and phone calls to the principal's office by parents and students. The list of possibilities to escalate goes on and on...





As the plan escalates, after each action, come together and debrief how it went. How did your actions move (or not) the decision makers? Who joined the efforts as a result of the organizing efforts? Any setbacks? What can you do to prepare for the next steps?

The real goal is to have lasting structures for RJ work and for the ability to make the changes necessary with the people in your community. This is more than just about one win. An organized group is always thinking ahead.

Sump to <u>Strategies & Tools</u> for tips like holding <u>one-on-ones</u> and crafting effective and powerful <u>messaging</u>.





<u>CHANGES TO MAKE</u> <u>AT YOUR SCHOOL</u>

Overview -

To follow are five kinds of changes you can make at your school, each organized into sections full of tactics to help accomplish that goal. You'll notice plenty of crossover and overlap – that's by design.

As you explore a section, have conversations with trusted friends, peers, and allies to determine which strategies make sense for your context and safety. As you decide which tactics you'll use, also keep in mind the big picture of what you want for your school. Ultimately, all these tactics seek to build vibrant, self-determined school communities that reject policing culture.

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We anticipate these sections will grow and evolve as we put this toolkit into practice. Do you have thoughts or contributions? <u>Send us a note</u>!

Where relevant, sections include references to external "Know Your Rights" materials. For example, educators, check out "<u>Speaking Out as a Public</u> <u>Employee</u>," and students, check out "<u>Your Rights as a Student Protestor</u>."





🔑 Theme –

IMPLEMENT RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

"I think that by using Restorative Justice it really is putting back the justice – the actual justice, the actual positive changes for students."

- High School Student

"We do Restorative Justice because we believe in the capacity of young people."

- High School Principal



What It Is –

At the core of Restorative and Transformative practices is attention to relationships. We may ask ourselves: *How are we in relationship with one another? What are our ways of being with one another?*

Author, artist, and Transformative Justice practitioner, adrienne maree brown, poses the question, "How many of you have grown up where when something bad happened, you were punished? Maybe you were put in time out, or had detention, or were suspended. These are our punitive structures. Now, imagine what it would be like to have engaged in conversation about the harm that happened, and listened to the perspectives of those harmed."²

Restorative (RJ) and Transformative Justice (TJ) are alternatives to punitive approaches. Rather than a response to harm that seeks to punish or exclude people, RJ and TJ practices seek to repair that harm and resolve conflict.

Fania Davis, civil rights attorney and co-founder of Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY), describes Restorative Justice as, "*a worldview that affirms our participation in a vast web of interrelatedness.*"³ When that web is ruptured it damages the relationships between individuals within the entire community. RJ and TJ practices are a way to repair harm within that web in order to restore relationships and transform the conditions which led to that harm in the first place. Restorative Justice is a holistic practice of healing harm that begins with building community.

TU has a longstanding <u>Member Toolkit</u> featuring more RJ school case studies from the past decade; check out some examples open to all:

- → Lehman High School
- → East Side Community High School

Against African Americans—Right Now." Yes Magazine.



² Barnard Center for Research on Women (2020). "What is Transformative Justice?" Available at <u>https://vimeo.com/395756782</u>.

³ Davis, Fania. 2016. "This Country Needs a Truth and Reconciliation Process on Violence



Why It Matters –

Restorative Justice is a transformative approach that seeks to address harm and conflict through a lens of healing and accountability, rather than pushing people into the criminal legal system. This approach centers collective community care; so why is that important?

Criminal legal systems focus on punishing someone labeled an "offender," and often fails to address the victim's or the community's needs. Restorative Justice, on the other hand, emphasizes healing for everyone involved. This approach encourages people to understand the impact of their actions and to actively participate in repairing the harm they've caused.⁴ Moreover, it recognizes the complexity of human behavior and the multitude of factors that contribute to harm, allowing for a more nuanced and empathetic approach to resolution.⁵

Restorative Justice also encourages community involvement in the healing process, thereby fostering a sense of collective responsibility and care which is vital for rebuilding trust and repairing relationships. By focusing on healing, Restorative Justice opens up possibilities for growth, positive change, and stronger communities. This transformative potential extends beyond the individuals directly involved in the conflict, influencing broader social attitudes and practices.⁶

To sum it up, Restorative Justice matters because it recognizes the importance of healing, community involvement, and the complexity of human behavior, offering a path to not only resolve immediate issues but also foster long-term transformation within individuals and communities. Indeed, repairing harm and taking action to "make things better" gives us hope to transform ourselves as well as our communities.

"Restorative Justice is something we need in schools. Sometimes it's hard to do in your own personal life. We've been trained to think about 'harm doers' as punishing them, instead of giving them another chance."

- High School Student

⁶ Lawrence W Sherman and Heather Strang (2007). *Restorative Justice: The Evidence*.



⁴ Howard Zehr (2002). *Little Book of Restorative Justice*.

⁵ D.W. Van Ness & Karen Heetderks Strong (2010). *Restoring Justice: An Introduction to Restorative Justice*.



Methods –

How you choose to implement restorative practices at your school will vary according to various factors, such as the degree to which your principal is supportivie, the staff programming at your school, the learning conditions of your students, and the amount of political education that has been shared with staff.

The Three Tiers to Restorative Justice –

- 1 Tier 1 focuses on building and strengthening relationships and a sense of community.
- 2 Tier 2 is response to harm and conflict; it focuses on processing harm as well as healing from the harm.
- 3 Tier 3 is re-entry to the community after an extended absence of some kind. Re-entry focuses on providing a supportive environment for the person/s coming back, and includes diverse stakeholders.

In the pages to follow are accounts from NYC students, educators, and caregivers who organized to implement restorative practices in their schools.

Restorative Justice is a theory of justice that is practiced expansively – certainly not limited to the school context. See projects like <u>Project NIA</u>'s "<u>Restorative Justice at Home</u>" to grow your understanding and practice.





TIER 1: COMMUNITY BUILDING

Tier 1 is the foundation of all restorative practices. These are practices that are going on at a schoolwide level and engage all members of the community. They include the building of relationships, creation of shared values, and sharing of stories through circles to facilitate a community where all members are recognized and heard.

"We ensure all folks working and collaborating in the school feel supported and seen. It's important to build community with everyone and have everyone contributing to the solution."

- Dean & RJ Coordinator

"A circle allows for us to see each other."

- High School Student

Teachers Unite created a documentary and teaching tool – Growing Fairness – about "growing" Restorative Justice practices in public schools.





Getting Started -

In order to begin this shift, school communities must reflect on their shared values and their vision for a more restorative school site.

"The shift to healing-centered education also involves careful self-reflection by school leadership and staff. To create sites of learning and healing, we must acknowledge that schools and related institutions have historically been sites of individual and systemic trauma. Becoming healing-centered requires transforming institutions to remove policies, actions, and behaviors that are rooted in that history and continue to perpetuate trauma and inequity."

– The Healing-Centered Schools Working Group

See <u>Community Roadmap to Bring Healing-Centered Schools to the Bronx</u>, a project of the Healing-Centered Schools Working Group.

For some communities the first step in Tier 1 is to rethink the ways the school is treating young people and staff. Oftentimes this begins with how adults see and interact with the young people in the building:

"Students have to believe that you see what's wonderful about them and what they are struggling with. Find what is remarkable about them and help them see that. For adults to see these things in our students is a really important thing. But it can't be inauthentic... You also have to be able to say the hard things... They will recognize that you see them and they still feel loved and cared for."

- Principal

This commitment to Tier 1 also begins with how staff is hired:

"Our hiring is done in a circle. We do group interviews. We make everyone tell a story. Prompts are given such as: 'Tell a story of a meaningful learning experience & when you were truly engaged in learning.' This tells us a lot about what potential hires think is engaging and meaningful. It can also help you see if people are authentic. That really helps with hiring and it helps with buy-in. People romanticize Restorative Justice, but no, bad things will happen and we need to know if you're okay with it."

- Principal





Tier 1 practices must include and engage families, as well as students and staff:

"Our school created a Restorative Justice curriculum for families using a movie created by Teachers Unite – getting everyone talking was critical. Family orientation helped to set the tone. We held conversations about how repairing harm is actually a consequence and more learning occurs than when students are suspended. New perspectives on the old school thinking of punitive justice is the only way. The conversations were held with the students and parents." – Dean & RJ Coordinator

There are many ways schools can work to engage and share power with families and school community members:

"Food is love! Sharing food is a humanizing experience that can be done without having to go through red tape. It builds trust and relationships when done consistently. Schools should have a budget and a plan for this."

- High School Dean

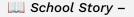
Lastly, find places to practice together:

"First, we use advisory. My advisor was originally the coordinator of RJ and he got us really into it. We did different types of RJ work, and were trained in it. In 11th grade it became a club which was an after-school thing. That was more about friends and word of mouth so it was more about who wanted to be in it and hearing about it from others."

- High School Student

"We do Restorative Justice with our teachers, between students and teachers, and for issues between teachers. For crew and advisory periods, we sit in circle. Staff need to sit in that way too and we all model what we want people to do." - Principal







In this account a dean (who is also a Restorative Justice coordinator) at a transfer school in Manhattan looks back and reflects on how their school community built RJ practices from the ground up, what worked and what didn't, and how their Tier 1 practices laid the foundation for where they are today.

After being asked to take on the role of a dean at their school, this person wanted to figure out how they could take a position that had originally been very punitive and all about "law and order" and instead leverage it to help transform their school into a more restorative and healing space.

1. The first step was to connect with allies to create a Restorative Justice team that included other deans, principals, students, social workers, and staff members. This team met regularly and utilized the advisory groups that were already in place at the school. The Restorative Justice team, with the stakeholders named above, started hosting meetings to introduce the concept schoolwide and began the process of rethinking how the school was treating young people.

"The RJ team helps ensure that all folks working and collaborating in the school feel supported and seen. It's important to build communities with everyone and have everyone contributing to the solution.

Adults also needed training on how to build positive cultures, community routines, and classroom agreements in their classrooms and schoolwide. This included SEL and Anti-Rascist training.

Students became peer mediators and peer leaders. Small groups of staff and students met to learn about restorative practices together."

- Dean & Restorative Justice Coordinator

2. Once the school had the Restorative Justice team in place, it was important to bring families and parents into the fold as well. Initially there was pushback, but the RJ team looked into the ways they could better involve families and determined that creating a curriculum and lessons for family groups was the next step.





→ Using a Teachers Unite film, <u>Growing Fairness</u>, the school created a curriculum to get the community engaged.

"We had pushback from parents about the 'softness' of Restorative Justice. Many families actually wanted harsher punishments. In response to this critique we held conversations about how repairing harm is actually a consequence and that more learning occurs than when students are suspended.

This allowed for new perspectives on old-school ways of thinking that punitive is the only way. These conversations were held with students and parents. They were facilitated by myself, the social worker, the parent coordinator, and administration. Advisers were also involved in the process and sometimes led discussions."

- Dean & Restorative Justice Coordinator

- → Eventually, the school began using their curriculum during orientation to introduce students and their families to Restorative Justice.
- 3. The team then established community values, starting with the question, "What exactly do we believe in as a school?" Naming these values and beliefs with intentional language was helpful to ensure that the community was on the same page. It allowed for whole-group integration and gave folks a North Star.
- 4. Once the groundwork was laid, it was necessary to ensure that everyone working and collaborating in the school felt supported and seen. It was important to have everyone working towards solutions.

"We identified staff who were typically having the most problems with RJ and relinquishing power. We provided these staff members with intentional support and check-ins."

"Staff was led through circles and had weekly check-ins. We showed folks how circles can also be used to strengthen student skills, in addition to resolving conflict and strengthening relationships"

- Dean & Restorative Justice Coordinator

- 5. Some practices came organically. For one, the Dean was outside every morning to greet young people as they were coming in. They often found themselves eating in the lunchroom and hanging out there to be visible, not controlling.
 - → Every week they maintained a standing meeting with school counselors and social workers. This helped build out their shared vision and restorative practice.





- 6. They also created a "Peace Room" a space where people could go to have restorative collaborations, take a breather, and feel their feelings.
 - → They were able to bring in a used exercise bike for the space, for those who found comfort in movement.
 - \rightarrow The room was also equipped with snacks, an essential component.

Ø Jump to the "<u>Repurpose your SAVE Room</u>" tactic under the Interrupt School Policing section for more tips on creating this kind of space in your school.

- 7. The Dean took on the role of liaison to the school police (aka "School Safety Agents") creating a relationship that facilitated alternatives to calling the police as a first response.
 - → They believed that it took engaging *everyone* to move the school to a more restorative culture. To this dean, this work meant harm reduction.
- 8. Having all community stakeholders on board and committed to the vision is imperative. Even if it is messy, difficult, involves tough conversations, or requires making bold asks to get the resources to do the work, when you are consistent you build trust over time.





TIER 2: RESPONDING TO HARM

Tier 2 focuses on processing harm as well as healing from the harm. The ways in which we process, respond to, and heal from harm are critical components to holistic policies and programming.

"We know from our own families that the chance to learn from mistakes—and fix the damage that has been done—is how we build trust and community. Restorative Justice in schools teaches children to understand the impact of their behavior and take responsibility."

The Parents of POWER-PAC

See COFI POWER-PAC's "<u>Parent to Parent Guide</u>."

Restorative practice can use a continuum, where all impacted school community members discuss the harm and its root causes and come to collective agreements about how the harm will be addressed. Pieces of a continuum include, but are not limited to:

- → Restorative Circles provide an opportunity for participants—guided by one or more circle keepers—to take turns speaking. There are many kinds of circles.
- → Fairness Committees are committees of students and staff who are trained in Restorative Justice practices. They work with school community members who have violated community norms to develop collective agreements.
- → Restorative Mediation allows community members who have been harmed to meet with the community member who caused the harm in a "safe and structured setting" so that they can "engage in a mediated discussion" facilitated by a trained mediator.





While strong Tier-2 practices should be understood and practiced by the whole community, members may engage with these practices in smaller groups depending on the situation. That being said, it should be noted that attempting to implement Tier 2 strategies without a strong Tier 1 is often ineffective.

Based on our interviews, some examples of Tier 2 include, but are not limited to:

Peer mediations that involve students, family, and staff;

🐲 Peace rooms;

Building systems to support staff development;

1 Building a common understanding of discipline with families and community.

"In our community sessions, some staff and students reported that their schools only employ Restorative Justice as a response to conflict. Their schools did not employ community-building restorative practices like culturally responsive circles or integration of restorative values in classroom learning. In addition, these community members reported that participation in restorative circles felt like going through the motions, and that the values and ideas presented in those circles did not line up with school culture.

For example, one student said that he does not buy into restorative circles because while he is expected to correct the harm he has caused, school staff are not held to the same standard when they inflict harm upon students. Another student reported that she does not buy into restorative circles because they are centered around healing the community, but her school does not have a strong sense of community. Other students report that restorative practices feel meaningless when the outcome – suspension – often stays the same."

- The Healing-Centered Schools Working Group

See <u>Community Roadmap to Bring Healing-Centered Schools to the Bronx</u>, a project of the Healing-Centered Schools Working Group.



Educators Use Data and Outside Trainings to Shift Mindsets and Replace Suspensions With Restorative Responses to Harm

In this account, two teachers were working at a high school in Brooklyn with a high rate of suspensions and detentions that were disproportionately impacting Black and Brown students. Students were experiencing conflicts without having any problem-solving policies or procedures in place. After their school data was publicly shared, and their second principal was more supportive, they began to grow their restorative programs at school.

Through staff trainings, the creation of an RJ committee, and frequent sharing and political education, they were able to build capacity to expand and grow their restorative responses to conflict, which ultimately resulted in a decrease of conflicts as well as the elimination of several punitive practices at school.

- 1. The teachers used their school discipline data to get buy-in from their principal and staff. This data was released publicly by students after completing their "intensive" (week-long class that students are in all day about a specific topic). At that point, the principal became supportive. The teachers note that principal buy-in was critical for their work. However, sometimes the principal still wanted to suspend students, and teachers had to continuously push for more restorative practices.
- 2. After becoming supportive, the principal arranged for staff to attend circle trainings with the <u>Morningside Center</u>. Two staff members (a teacher and dean) were trained in peer mediation by the <u>Commission on Human Rights</u>.

"If people don't have training they won't feel confident, even if they are philosophically aligned. Transition from being a 20 person staff to 45 person staff is very different in terms of onboarding."

- Teacher

3. Staff formed a Restorative Justice Committee to brainstorm and plan how to transition from punitive discipline to RJ. The committee included six teachers, a social worker, and the principal. While some staff were supportive, they did not have full buy-in from all staff.





4. The committee met every two weeks for the first year to plan interventions and to plan how to address the non-believers: "How do we convince people that detention doesn't work?" There was a lot of work that went into countering misinformation and bias against RJ practices.

Committee members wanted to make sure staff understood that:

- a. RJ is not the easy way out of consequences;
- b. RJ is not currently championed by the prevailing social order;
- c. Insubordination is not a reason for punishment.

"We looked at how being a united front, even if you don't 100% agree, will help with community building, and talked a lot about approaching people assuming best intentions."

- Brooklyn High School Dean

"There was a lot of fear from teachers about 'what do I do with kids who are being disruptive if there is not a threat to kick kids out."

- Brooklyn High School Educator

- 5. The teachers involved started small and expanded their practices as they built capacity and buy-in.
 - → Peer mediation was one of the first initiatives started. Initially, only two staff members were involved – a teacher and dean who were trained by the Commissioner on Human Rights. Afterwards, staff began training students, which helped the school start to shift towards RJ.
 - → Circles was a separate, concurrent initiative.

"Two things that happened with mediation - circles need more staff buy-in. Mediations don't need as much staff buy-in - just a couple of adults and kids. We started having fewer conflicts right away because people were learning how to communicate better. This is something a small number of teachers can do with just a few students - offering new ways of thinking about conflict. The administration stated an expectation that crew leaders [advisors] run circles during crew [advisory]. Expectations about crew circles changed and students became familiar with being in circle during crew."

- Brooklyn High School Dean





6. Teachers eliminated punitive practices, which then led to policy change.

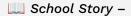
"Before this there were many teachers that had already just stopped giving detention."

- Brooklyn High School Educator

"One of the biggest shifts was in our second semester of working on this we just announced that there was no more detention. This is not possible without admin buy-in."

- Brooklyn High School Dean







In this account, a former teacher was a founding member of a High School in the Bronx that had actual NYPD officers on-site. Dealing with unsupportive admin, a predominantly new staff, and a large amount of student fights and conflicts, the teacher recounts how he began planting seeds for RJ practices after noticing that the old policies were not working and students were disinterested and disengaged.

Despite feeling unsuccessful about the peer mediation elective, fairness committee, and attempted shift to RJ practices, he emphasizes the importance of organizing stakeholders, continuing the work regardless of administrative participation, and engaging families & students in the process.

"Staff exercising more democratic control of their workplace is essential for any chance of long-term success."

- Bronx High School Educator

- 1. The teacher assessed current school policies and identified that they were not working. He notes that "our school was failing in every single category."
 - → He met with administration & organized a PD (professional development) on Restorative Justice. This led to staff & administrative buy-in.
 - → Towards the end of the year, admin allowed the teacher to pilot a peer mediation system for the following year during elective blocks.
- 2. The teacher used elective time to build a peer mediation program with students.
 - → This elective was initially taught only by this teacher. Electives already existed as part of the school's programming, so it was easy for the teacher to create a peer mediation program during a block or time slot that already existed.
 - → The RJ elective was used as a space to train students in Restorative Justice practices (specifically peer mediation).
- 3. The teacher used TU materials to help structure a fairness committee.





- → The teacher initially learned about fairness committees from TU. He was attending TU meetings & meeting with the TU educator group in the Bronx.
- → He also had access to TU educational materials related to fairness committees and knew of other schools that used this model. The staff decided how they wanted to structure fairness committees at their school, and they began to implement them.

"The purpose of the Fairness Committee was to build beyond simply doing peer mediation"

- Bronx High School Educator

- 4. The teacher reached out to MORE-UFT for support.
 - → A new staff member was hired to take over the RJ work at the school, however they overlooked previous systems and excluded youth voices. The teacher began organizing staff & learning more about RJ and less punitive disciplinary options.

"We have to start by building power within our chapter or the failure of our program is guaranteed, it's just a question of how long it lasts."

- Bronx High School Educator

If staff are not organized and don't have the power to essentially demand an RJ program, then the program can be eliminated at any time by an administrator. So, staff exercising more democratic control of their workplace is essential for any chance of long term success. Leadership changes so much in the DOE and they have so much power by default, that we are essentially at their whim unless we take power back for ourselves.







In this account, an organizer is working in the role of a Dean and Restorative Justice coordinator at a High School in Lower Manhattan. Although Restorative Justice practices were already being implemented at the school, after attending a "Fairness" Training with the other deans, he learned more about the process of conflict resolution (especially with teenagers).

He stresses the importance of relationships & "circle keepers" functioning like a family, and shares the story about a 10th grader who was taken to fairness after frequently leaving school early, and the positive impact that the fairness process had.

- 1. The deans at the school collectively attended a training about the "Fairness" Process.
- 2. He ensured that fairnesses were completely youth-led.
 - \rightarrow The responsibility to "fix" the issues is entirely up to the students.
 - → Too often, people do not have the chance or space to share their own stories; they need the opportunity to speak uninterrupted
 - → He notes that relationships are the biggest part of this process. It's important for "Circle keepers" to feel like a family for students to feel cared for and for community transformation and conflict resolution to occur.
- 3. He aims for the evidence of transformation across the school community to help to shift teacher mindsets and increase staff participation & buy-in.
 - → Once other staff members began to see the evidence of success and transformation within the school, more staff became committed to the process.
 - → Current pushback within the school community is now limited to only when students are cutting class and receiving low grades.



- → A lot of staff members struggle to believe that "farinesses" and Restorative Justice are a solution. It's important to help teachers understand that the process isn't perfect; it can be flawed, and sometimes it doesn't work perfectly the first time. You can always take a break and come back to it or try it again.
- → He plans to have youth circle keepers train all teachers within the next two years. This would allow for all teachers to be prepared to facilitate a fairness process and will increase staff participation.

"A lot of teachers struggle that fairnesses and Restorative Justice isn't a solution. The work is about helping teachers understand that it's always flawed and that if it doesn't go well the first time we can take away, prep and do another one – it can always be done better."

- Restorative Justice Coordinator





Dean At Bronx 6-12 School Seeks Out RJ Trainings to Shift Mindset & Use Restorative Practices to Respond to Conflict

In this account, an educator shifts into the position of dean at his school. After struggling with maintaining relationships & upholding pedagogical values in his new position, he found Restorative Justice trainings through the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP). With these trainings and new information, the dean was able to shift his own practices, both in how he listens to students & how he functions in relation to the students and school as a whole.

In addition to personal reflection, he also began to share information and train colleagues at his school (both staff who were on board & staff who did not agree with this philosophy). He emphasizes the importance of creating an environment fueled by collaboration & creating space to celebrate kids while also maintaining clear and consistent boundaries.

"I'm direct and straightforward. They say that I'm fair and love that I'm fair. They see it. Fairness is really important for Restorative Justice."

- High School Dean

- 1. The dean reflected on his own experiences. He realized that when he became a dean, he wasn't focusing on relationships (even though this was something he valued as an educator). An important moment for him was when he lost a relationship over a conflict regarding school uniforms.
 - → He had a circle with two students. He listened to feedback and realized that he needed to do things differently as a dean. This was an important moment of reflection for his RJ work; it was the catalyst that began the journey to shift his personal practices and bring RJ to the larger school community.
- 2. He sought out trainings on Restorative Justice. After not finding any resources or support from the Department of Education (DOE), he discovered the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP).





- → He attended a training with superintendents, principals, social workers, & guidance counselors. He was the only dean present.
- → After hearing other participants talk about "circles," he met a woman & sat in her circle. After participating, he knew he wanted to bring circles back to his school.
- 3. He built his **personal support network**. He remained in contact with the woman from the training & met other people who were facilitating circles at their schools.
 - → This created a space for sharing ideas & exchanging materials and resources.
 - → This prompted him to do more of his own research: reading books and watching informational videos on Youtube.
 - → He spoke at a Restorative Justice Conference at Fordham. After meeting an RJ practitioner from the DOE who validated his work, he realized that there were so many more elements to circle-keeping: entering kids without judgment, meeting kids where they're at.
- 4. He shifted his personal practices as dean.
 - → He changed how he engaged with student conflict. Instead of assigning punishments, he began to listen & ask questions. It was challenging for the first two or three years, but he got better with practice.

"This question alone 'What happened?' changed everything. It used to be 'you did this and I do this.' That question changed everything about how I became a dean. It changed dynamics because by asking the question, I'm actively listening and validating an experience."

- High School Dean

→ He emphasizes the importance of modeling restorative practices. He spends a lot of time visiting different classrooms in the school to make his presence known & to let people know that he's available. He invests this time because it helps to create an environment where kids feel safe enough to be honest.

🧭 For more ideas & practices like this, jump back to <u>Tier 1: Community Building</u>.





"I don't want to model change from fear because then when I'm not here, it'll be like I didn't teach them anything. They have to do it when I'm not here. That's how I know I did my job. I don't want them to fear me."

- High School Dean

- 5. He **taught other educators** how to facilitate circles.
 - → He notes that it's important to remember that everyone is equal in a circle. You have to be able to listen to people & not take things personally.
 - → During the pandemic, he stopped training educators because of other immediate needs and priorities.
 - → He brought in outside organizations and brought students into the work.
 - → He identified other staff members who had clout (staff with respect & connections) as a way to bring in more educators.
 - → He notes that it's important to share information with everyone, including staff members who may not be on board with RJ. Because of this, other teachers have learned that RJ is about more than just circles.

"Starting small is key. Not everyone had to be on board. Even if you just get one or two teachers, others will see it works and anyone who wants change will see it happening and that it's worth it."

- High School Teacher





P Theme – Implement Restorative Practices

TIER 3: REENTRY

Sometimes students and families are forced into an extended period of time away from the school community (i.e. out-of-school suspensions, arrests, moving away briefly, etc.). Tier 3 practices, such as parent conferences or re-entry Circles, aim to reintegrate community members in a humane manner by providing intensive support and promoting student accountability. These practices also empower community members to repair relationships and welcome students and families when they return to school.

"A classmate got arrested. He was somewhat disconnected from school. I talked to him and had a great convo. 'When is your court date? We'll all go? It's really important to have someone who can ask questions and won't be intimidated.

So we went and we were able to get him off. He told all his friends and suddenly we were going to court to support all of our kids. It was one move. It was a simple move. It said to the kids "we are part of the government, but we can be your advocates and give you inside knowledge."

- High School Principal

While school communities may approach re-entry in somewhat different ways depending on why a student was removed, all school communities that contributed to this toolkit spoke to the importance of having a re-entry process that focuses on establishing shared values, identifying the needs of everyone involved, and formulating a plan for how the community member will be supported and by whom.

Participation in a re-entry Circle may include, but is not limited to:

- → The student and their caregiver(s);
- → Teachers;
- → Administrators;
- → A Circle facilitator; and
- → Any additional people identified by the student who can assist with the transition plan.



"After a suspension, you can follow up, have a restorative circle, and take the time. Villages can ask people to leave for a little bit. Suspending kids doesn't mean failure in your RJ program. Whatever compromises you feel like you're making, you have to remember that RJ is super comprehensive and you do the pieces you can do. Building community and ongoing support groups are really important. When someone has a breakthrough, have them share it.

- High School Principal

Restorative Justice advocates organized and pressured NYCPS to include restorative reentry into the <u>Discipline Code</u>, so now, it reads:

"Schools must provide appropriate supports to students... when they return to their home school from suspension... It is incumbent upon a student's home school to continue supports. Supports may include any of the range of supports and interventions or a combination of both, as best meets the needs of the individual student."

Quick Tools & References -

- → <u>Re-Entry Circle Guide</u>, from National Educators for Restorative Practices
- → An example <u>Restorative Welcome and Reentry Circle</u>, from the Oakland Unified School District
- → <u>Tier III Welcome Circle/Reentry Protocol For OUSD Students</u>, from the Oakland Oakland Unified School District's Restorative Justice Implementation Guide





🔑 Theme –

ACTUALIZE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CURRICULUM

"Adults can ask what we want to see in the curriculum – we could even be building it."

- High School Student

"Schools can get more opinions about what students want to be learning and what teachers are teaching."

- High School Student

"I've learned, in talking to parents, I can't always lead with 'police-free schools,' but if you talk about Restorative Justice rooted in Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education – that is something people can get behind, to build a template from there for what a police-free school can look like."

– Parent





What it is –

Culturally Responsive and Culturally Sustaining curriculum is one important way that young people see themselves reflected in their school community and in the curriculum. Restorative practices are at their best when Tier 1 (community building) is satisfied for the general population of school. How do we reach the largest number of community members? Through the curriculum.

"...there is a strong relationship among curriculum, pedagogy, and restorative practices. Restorative Justice can't grow in the margins of scripted, test-driven curriculum; it's based on teachers hearing, understanding, and responding to the academic, social, and emotional needs of students."

– The Editors at Rethinking Schools⁷

 \checkmark In 2018, 93 percent of NYC teachers surveyed by NYU Metro Center were open to making their curriculum more culturally responsive, but 59 percent did not have access to the resources needed to do so.⁸

⁸ Jahque Bryan-Gooden & Megan Hester. 2018. Is NYC Preparing Teachers to Be Culturally Responsive? Data Snapshot. Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools. Retrieved from <u>https://docs.steinhardt.nvu.edu/pdfs/metrocenter/atn293/coe/Metro_Center_Teacher_Survey_Results_FINAL.pdf</u>.



⁷ "Restorative Justice: What it is and is not," by the Editors of Rethinking Schools, Retrieved from <u>https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/restorative-justice/</u>.

"When we talk about curriculum and how to change curriculum to be more culturally inclusive, take the time to plan lessons that show the true representation of different cultures. During Black History Month we only learn about a few select figures, and that's only during one month. How do we actually make sure that these groups are represented? Students from these groups should really be included in planning curriculum that is culturally responsive."

- High School Student

Why it Matters –

When you feel like your experiences are seen, heard, and valued by others there is an immediate feeling of safety and belonging. Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curriculum is a vehicle that drives safety and belonging in school communities. It helps to build relationships between youth and staff, youth and youth, and between staff and staff.

"[Abolitionist teaching requires] teachers who work in solidarity with their schools' community to achieve incremental changes in their classrooms and schools for students in the present day, while simultaneously freedom dreaming and vigorously creating a vision for what schools will be..."

> – Dr. Bettina Love <u>We Want To Do More Than Survive</u>⁹

Black Lives Matter at NYC Schools offers introductory resources, classroom curriculum, and book lists.

⁹ We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom (2019) p.89





List of Methods –

- → Taking accountability as an educator or adult.
- → Using the format of a circle to discuss content in classes.

"You've got to take accountability as a teacher."

- High School Student

"I think people forget how an inclusive environment makes people feel. Having more of these inclusive things makes people feel safe. People feel empowered."

- High School Student

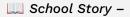
- → Survey youth in your classes to ask them about topics, people, events, or other issues that they want to explore in class.
- → Include youth in planning a specific lesson.
- → Understand the historical (and contemporary) context of your content.

"As educators, we understand that our curriculum will need to shift and change based on the demographics of our students as well as the real-life experiences that are occurring. As staff, we deepen our well of understanding of culturally responsive education and we use those opportunities to strengthen our discourse and find common language to align our practices."

- High School Educator

- → Do not teach to a standardized test. Standardized tests are historically racist and do not provide opportunities for youth to demonstrate skill-based knowledge.
- → Rather than traditional grading practices, adopt action-based grading systems, which are also known as "competency based grading" or "mastery based grading." This practice gives students opportunities to demonstrate their growth in a particular skill over time.
- → Advocate and dedicate courses at your school that are designed to promote Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Curriculum.





Students Create an Elective & Design Curriculum

"At our school, we recognize the power of bridging lived experiences with learning and education as well as with restorative practices. Culturally responsive teaching and learning is about continuously sustaining that bridge and maintaining it over time."

- High School Educator

- 1. For years, students at a high school in the Bronx wanted to learn more about the history of hip hop. It felt natural to have an elective course where students could dive into this rich history in the borough where they live.
- 2. Students approached a teacher who was interested in teaching the course.
- 3. Now, in its third year as an elective course, students are heading out of the building to learn more about where hip hop was born.

At that same high school, students were able to reshape an elective on restorative practices:

- 1. When a school was building out its restorative practices, an elective course called "Introduction to Transformation Justice" was offered to students in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. What happened in the past was that students who had holes in their schedules were assigned to this elective course, making the class a tough space for engagement.
- 2. A teacher and assistant principal came together to advocate for a new iteration of the elective course. The two advocated in front of administrators during weekly meetings and held "vision meetings" with administration and the Transformative Justice team.
- 3. In the school year 2023-2024, a new elective course emerged for all incoming 9th graders. Now, all 9th graders at the school are taking "Reading for Justice," a course that is designed as an intro to TJ.
 - a. Students taking this course in the inaugural year are a part of designing the curriculum: What kinds of projects do they want to do? What topics are they interested in?
 - b. Students are choosing social interest topics to dive into and learn more about in order to shift the discourse in their communities. The course is





aligned with <u>Civics for All</u>, and, with the projects students are engaging in starting from 9th grade through 12th grade, they can receive a Civic readiness stamp on their diploma.

4. The elective keeps adapting. Youth in this course are designing a youth-led conference that will take place in May of 2024 as their final project.

"This isn't just one year of work, this is about changing the culture of grading policies and practices in general. After reading Dr. Gholdy Muhammed,¹⁰ we've been shifting towards action-based grading. Action-based grading, along with culturally responsive pedagogy, is in alignment with Transformative Justice in our school. Now, about 10 years later, we're in a place where all of these elements are a part of our school's overall vision."

- High School Educator

¹⁰ Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework Resource Book. (2020). Dr. Gholdy Muhammad. Scholastic.





📖 School Story –

Elementary School Teacher Kickstarts a School's Transition to Embracing Culturally Responsive Education

An elementary school teacher effectively applied pressure on her administrator, brought reluctant teachers into the curriculum development work, and steadily began rolling out critical pedagogy one period at a time.

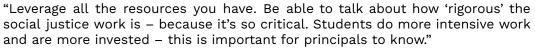
- 1. A beginner teacher worked with <u>NYCORE</u> to bring Black Lives Matter at Schools content to her classroom. When she brought the idea to staff, there wasn't consensus.
- 2. Not all families understood the content; she faced outright backlash.

"If families are adversaries, then we can only communicate through fighting. I set up regular calls to communicate what we were doing. I understand it makes the most sense to position families as advocates, allies, and deep funds of knowledge when I'm trying to do critical work."

- Elementary School Teacher

- 3. She encouraged other teachers to realize that opportunities for conversation already came up organically in the classroom.
- 4. The educator partnered with a trainer and leveraged resources that offered critical perspectives on children's and young adult literature.
- 5. They started a monument study. The educator used reading and writing workshop times to read and learn about monuments in New York City.
 - → The educator would make her own materials, and the class would go through questions like "What are monuments?" and "Why do we want to remember?" and "What aren't we remembering?"
 - → The class took field trips to look at different historical figures.
 - → Students picked a topic and envisioned and built their own monument. This became a schoolwide share for everyone to see.
 - → Seeing this, other teachers leaned into the idea that critical lessons are always better, and it was fun to teach content that students were into.





- Elementary School Teacher

- 6. Other teachers opened up to the curriculum. Some needed more models of what the curriculum could look like. Many acknowledged that New York State materials were offensive.
 - → Even where teachers did not want to lead on taking on more work, they were open to helping out.
 - → One way to get more teachers invested was to help do the legwork but not doing everything.
- 7. The school still required that the teacher spend a heartbreaking amount of time on test prep. The principal would constantly ask for more "selling points" and more reasons to do this work.

"Usually a lot of our 'whys' were what kids brought into the process. Then I would match their interests to any test prep that we had to do."

- Elementary School Teacher





Elementary School Student Pushes their Principal to Include more Black History

In this account, a 3rd grade student demands that their principal and teachers adopt a more culturally responsive curriculum that centers Black history.

"I was at dinner with my mom and my sister. We were talking about Black leaders and important people. I asked 'Why don't I know anything about these people?' and my mom said 'because you don't learn about them at school.' That made me really curious, so I wrote a letter to my principal and teachers."

- Elementary School Student

- 1. Motivated by a dinner conversation with their mother and sister, the student reflected on the absence of Black history and leaders in their school curriculum.
- The student decided to take individual action to address this absence by writing a letter to the school's principal. In the letter, they expressed a desire to learn more about Black leaders and asked the principal to encourage teachers to incorporate more information about Black history in the curriculum. The student sent the letter through Class Dojo – a platform used for school communication.
- 3. The principal acknowledged receipt of the letter, and the following year, the student noticed a significant change in the curriculum, with more content about influential Black leaders being taught.
- 4. The student engaged in conversations with their peers about the new materials, noting an overall increase in excitement and satisfaction amongst the student body. Even when the student had a tense relationship with a teacher, the student remained engaged in school due to the more responsive and relevant curriculum.

"If you [as a student] feel like something is wrong and you don't like it, speak up. Use your voice. [Teachers should] ask the kids what they're interested in. [Parents:] talk to your kids about subjects you think are important – maybe they'll get interested too."

- Elementary School Student



📖 School Story –

Parent Helps Grow a District Equity Team

In this account, a parent of elementary school children leverages her network to start, and recruit for, a parent equity team in their district.

- 1. After attending a mayoral town hall on education and witnessing parent pushback to equity plans, a parent began looking around for parents or people she could organize with who were interested in equity work.
- 2. When CEC meetings went online during the pandemic, she began connecting with parents who attended the meetings parents who were already active.
- 3. Together, they formed a group and began looking for more organizations doing equity work.
 - → Parents were eager to find youth-led organizations that were most directly impacted.
 - → This parent group then began pulling parents from their own school communities.
- 4. She began talking to other parents at the playground and bringing them into the work.

"You have to have the willingness and the desire on top of the information, and not everyone is going to agree that what I care about is as urgent as I think it is. Part of providing actions for people to take is providing some education."

– Parent

- She connected with organizers and academics and invited them to come into their space to talk about what culturally responsive sustaining education was – and what it wasn't.
- 6. The parents then held a teach-in around the CEC elections, as part of a broad initiative to get parents to vote for the CEC positions.

"You don't want to bore people. Normally I'd put an abolitionist spin on things." – Parent



"We're thinking more about how we can create ways for parents who are less engaged or who have less time or are not as motivated to participate, things people can do from home or at night – thinking about how to get more people engaged and different levels of engagement."

– Parent

7. Along the way, the parent kept track of the messaging that alienated people.

"Now I know I want to be in community with people: appeal to people on the issue, here is the issue, this is the impact on your school, here is the data. Over time I've tried to be more to the point – here is what is happening to you and I know you care and here is what to do."

– Parent

- 8. The vision is to disseminate tools that School Leadership Teams (SLTs) can use to push for culturally responsive sustaining education in their school, and achieve that for every SLT in their district.
 - → Some parents have been motivated to start that conversation in their schools as a result of the equity group.
 - \rightarrow When the principal was reluctant, parents went to the superintendent.

"Look around, find the people doing the work, and listen. If you have no one right now, grab a friend, grab somebody, start going to your PTA meetings, go to your SLT meetings, go to PEP meetings, take a look at your parent groups online, go where conversations are happening, talk to parents at drop off or pick up, at the playground – find your people."

– Parent

All CECs are required by NYS Education Law to have non-voting student members, though <u>very few</u> follow the law right now. You can run for that spot if you're a high school senior in the district and a member of student body government or hold a leadership position in a student organization, like a club. <u>Check out the application here</u>.





Leverage Your School Leadership Team

There are many kinds of goals the School Leadership Team (SLT) can set to influence your school's plan for actualizing culturally responsive sustaining curriculum, for example:

- → Increase your school's diversity
- → Increase college preparation support
- → Bring more arts into the curriculum
- → Start a sports program
- → Change homework policies

🧭 To explore more about SLTs, jump to <u>Step 2: Assess Your School</u>.

Take a look at <u>this story</u> about a Brooklyn Elementary School that put an end to their gifted and talented track with the goal of resisting racial and economic segregation.





🔑 Theme –

HIRE RESTORATIVE STAFF

"Hired restorative staff have to be nice and supportive of students. They have to have a good relationship with us to make us feel comfortable."

- High School Student

"You have to have dedicated staff. You need to create a group of people who are not only willing to do the work, but who will be the RJ cheerleaders for when things get tough. This means dedicating positions to culture work."

- Educator

"What I like about our school community is that every teacher is really involved in restorative practices. Sometimes it doesn't have to be hiring specific Restorative Justice staff, which would be awesome, but really about training teachers and other staff to understand students and their needs. It's amazing that we have a community where every adult, every student is involved in Restorative Justice."

- High School Student





What It Is –

Schools create positions like a "Restorative Justice coordinator" to assist in the whole-school adoption and implementation of restorative practices (jump back to <u>Implement Restorative Practices</u> for additional approaches).

At its core, restorative practices are preventative, offering proactive tools and strategies to create a culture of connectivity where all members of the school community feel safe, respected, and valued. Restorative Justice staff work as stable champions for restorative practices and take on some of the responsibility for time-intensive schoolwide implementation. This role is not one-size-fits-all; the expectations for the role are different across schools according to what they decide they need.

Why It Matters –

The work of maintaining a restorative school should not (and cannot) be the sole responsibility of one person. But when schools have designated staff roles to support community building and organizing infrastructure to respond to conflict, Restorative Justice can be practiced with more fidelity. Restorative Justice staff are able to show up consistently and alongside students, families, and school community members to advocate for what is needed to build trust and a restorative school culture.

From the top-down, DOE Central has yet to lead initiatives that allocate funds directly to schools to hire restorative staff positions. There isn't yet a DOE budget line for "Restorative Justice coordinator," for instance. The DOE often tells advocates that it "isn't a priority" or it's "too expensive" to scale up. Don't let that discourage you. As we push for system-wide change, schools are making restorative staff positions happen in our own ways.



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"Our Restorative Justice coordinator position always came through the principal, it was very unofficial."

- High School Educator

Throughout this section, it's worth acknowledging that principals have tremendous power in deciding whether or not to have a Restorative Justice coordinator on their staff. However, principals do not have control over the sum total of their budget. Consider how your school community might work together to move a principal to take action within these kinds of constraints. Jump to <u>Step 2: Assess Your School</u> for related tools.



Paid Student Internships & Credits for Restorative Justice Electives

School communities have found creative ways to get resources directly to students in order to lead Restorative Justice processes. Opportunities for young people can often be hard to find, or you need to know who to ask to know what's possible.

Some way to start is to reach out to DOE Central, and the team responsible for Restorative Justice initiatives: <u>NYCDOERestorativePractices@schools.nyc.gov</u> You can also check out the <u>DOE's High School Academic Policy Guide</u> which lays out how schools can choose to award credits for internships and service-learning experiences.

Youth Restorative Justice (YRJ) –

YRJ is a group of high school students who come together twice a month to discuss restorative practices and share best practices to implement them in schools. YRJ is designed to support students in reforming schools to center restorative practices. Young people who participate in YRJ can be hired into a paid role as a "Co-op intern" in the DOE, where they can be placed anywhere in the DOE that has a budget line for it.

"It's definitely really important to have youth be hired as co-op interns or under RJ umbrellas in order to do the work. They can be peer mediators, they can plan/facilitate/run circles, they can just be supportive of what the other RJ/TJ folks are doing in their school. Either way, include youth and hire them to do the work that they are already doing in school."

- High School Student

"Co-op interns can be hired through the superintendent's office and with help from your school's principal and procurement officer. Then, those students can do hours as a hired intern at your school, or can be hired by another school within your district. We currently have a few co-op interns, and we'll be putting through paperwork for a few more this year!"

- Educator





Leveraging DYCD-Funded Programs –

The NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) funds a wide range of programs for young people.

Check out <u>DYCD internship programs</u> for DOE students, like "Learn & Earn" (Formerly the In-School Youth Program).

Educators used the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) to pay a team of students over the summer to build out a Restorative Justice program for the coming school year.

Creating Electives to Train Student Practitioners –

Schools can distribute credits for Restorative Justice work that students are doing.

In one high school peer mediator class, students are referred to peer mediators so a group of peers can help work through the incident. Student mediators are trained in a conflict-resolution elective and students receive credits for enrolling in the class. Peer mediation is used both to prevent fights and to restore community after a fight.

"We have a Restorative Justice class. Students are trained to be peer mediators and mentors. They graduate from that class and, if they have time, we put them in with the staff RJ coordinators for a period to do more work."

– Principal





Youth Advocate Positions & Paras

School communities can use the Paraprofessional position as a career pathway to creative restorative jobs in schools. The DOE Career Training Program, among other "paraprofessional-to-teacher pathway programs," provides tuition assistance to current paraprofessionals, and schools can use this pathway to hire recent school alumni as paraprofessionals on the way to hiring teachers or other school staff.

"Folks are hired under a paraprofessional line as alumni from our school. We try to get them through the college process while they are with us. So far, five have gone on to be teachers. All young men of color. We talk about getting more Black and Brown men in front of classrooms, and that's our informal pipeline. They get to spend a lot of time with kids so when they are teachers they are fairly comfortable with parts of their job."

– Principal

Schools can also hire for the role of Youth Advocate under the paraprofessional line:

"Currently three 'Youth Advocates' are alumni from our school. Our youth advocates go on to be teachers. This is an informal pipeline. A bunch of our teachers used to be Youth Advocates. One of our current youth advocates started the Restorative Justice program as a student. We have a Restorative Justice class where students are trained to be peer mediators and mentors. They graduate from that class and, if they opt in, they have a period with the RJ coordinators to do more work. We don't have a traditional student government so students join RJ."

– Principal

When former students are hired as school staff, they can "see the picture in multiple frames," according to one staff member, meaning people who are trained in Restorative Justice can empathize with both the role of a teacher and the experiences of students.





Using an SBO Vote

A school-based option (SBO) allows for UFT members at a school to create positions that aren't automatically established under the UFT-DOE contract. UFT members can use the SBO process to create comp-time positions.

The SBO remains in effect for only one school year and must be renewed every year to continue. An SBO can be proposed by either the principal or the UFT chapter leader on behalf of the chapter. An SBO cannot be adopted unless at least 55% percent of the voting UFT members support it.

"The school built an RJ position where a teacher got two periods off to develop the role. There was a team of six teachers, students active in social studies, an advisee, and a parent. Students were welcomed into the chapter meetings at the beginning of the meeting for the student council to share their experience of what was working and what wasn't. The creation of the position was not the end goal. The goal was to shift power in the school and create something that lasts through turnover."

- Educator

Schools have "compensatory time positions"¹¹ which are non-teaching assignments. These assignments are done in place of teaching periods. The principal and chapter committee determine the comp time positions and must agree on the qualifications required for each position. Then UFT members at your school ratify those positions through an SBO vote.

- → SBO is required for positions like: conflict resolution, additional dean
- → SBO is not required for: peer mediation facilitator, dean (<u>see the next section on</u> <u>the dean role</u> for more information)

"If the school isn't using things like comp time positions then don't use it, find something else."

Educator

¹¹ To see what the UFT contract says about compensatory time positions, check out 7A3, 7A6, 7B3, 7C4, 7K3 and 7U.



📖 SBO Process –



"To get the RJ coordinator position this year, there was a request for it to be a full-time position and to put it in the SBO vote."

- Manhattan Middle School Educator

In one story, an educator organized an SBO vote to create a Restorative Justice liaison. The school had a Restorative Justice coordinator, but the position was funded by an outside grant – not permanent, and not DOE funded. The principal was on board, and the principal, chapter leader, and Restorative Justice coordinator wrote the SBO ballot.

The school knew that other schools had done something similar, i.e. created a model for comp time and used a DOE template. One note of caution is that the SBO is imprecise and inevitably leaves out a lot of work that is part of the role.

The team knew that even if the vote went through, the principal's budget (somewhat outside of the control of the school community) was a factor as to whether it could happen.

It can be valuable to organize with others in your chapter to build support for the SBO ballot through one-on-one conversations with other members. This will give you a sense of how much support you have for the SBO before introducing it, and begin the work of building the support needed to approve it.

There is time between when the SBO is introduced and when the vote takes place. This is a crucial time to continue conversations within your chapter to secure votes. Keep in mind that the timeline can be tight, and you may not have time for all the conversations you want to have—this is why it's so important to do this work collaboratively and to share the load.

"Anticipate questions like 'Will there be enough work for this role?' or 'How will this impact my teaching load or class size?' or 'Do we have the physical space for this?' or general questions about the efficacy of Restorative Justice. All in all, it's important to talk to people about their concerns! Relationships are a big part of Restorative Justice, and the work takes trust."

- Manhattan Transfer High School Educator





SAMPLE: SBO Ballot For Restorative Practices Liaisons –

SBO Ballot

Compensatory Time Positions/Out of Classroom Positions [District/School] [DBN] [School Year]

Contract Article 7 -

Each spring the principal and UFT chapter committee shall meet to review the compensatory time positions in the school with the goal of agreeing upon the number of responsibilities, qualifications, basis for selection and term for compensatory time positions in their school.

SBO Modification -

This SBO would create compensatory time positions, in which a teacher who applies and is selected would teach a reduced number of periods per week. The remainder of the teacher's 25 teaching periods and 5 professional assignment periods per week would be spent on activities as outlined in the postings.

I want my school, (*District/School*), to modify the contract as stated above by recreating/creating these comp time positions –

Item –

1-3 Restorative Practices Liaison(s)

Position Description -

Help direct students in conflict to the appropriate resource: Peer Mediator, Dean, Principal, Social Worker. Help lead re-entry meetings with students returning from a suspension using a circle process. Assist in coordinating services for Restorative Practices such as where and when mediations and re-entry meetings could take place. Promote the use of circles in Crew as a foundation for community wellness. Facilitate communication between the Restorative Justice coordinator and classroom teachers.

Compensatory Time -

Relief from 4 periods of teaching per week. Number of relieved periods is dependent upon budget and programming constraints.

Term length – 1 year

Vote to Create Restorative Practices Liaison(s) -

🗌 Yes

🗌 No



Using a Dean Position & Creating Additional Dean Positions

Some schools label their dean as the "Restorative Justice Dean" who functions as a Restorative Justice coordinator. The collective bargaining agreement between the DOE and the UFT allows for the establishment of dean positions at all school levels:

- → One dean for up to 500 students
- → Two deans for 500-1,000 students
- → Three deans for enrollment over 1,000

Dean positions may also be created using the SBO process. These positions require a posting in consultation with the chapter leader and a ratified SBO vote. Schools can create additional dean positions through the SBO process.

Ø Jump back to <u>Using An SBO Vote</u> for more.

For the dean posting, schools may select up to three "additional school-specific criteria" from a list on the specific posting:¹²

- → Ability to speak a specific language other than English (including proficiency in American Sign Language).
- → Willingness to learn video surveillance systems.
- → Willingness to learn scanning procedures.
- → Willingness to attend specific training including (but not limited to) LSCI, TCI, and conflict resolution.

For existing deans who have not yet adopted restorative practices, consider organizing to move that dean to adopt different practices, or organizing to better define the expectations of the dean role.

¹² See more at <u>https://www.uft.org/sites/default/files/attachments/dean-posting.pdf</u>





Leverage Your School Leadership Team

Every school has a School Leadership Team (SLT) made up of parents, teachers, students (in high schools), and admin. Each year, the SLT works to identify goals for the school, strategies to meet those goals, and ways to align the school budget to those goals. These are written up in the annual Comprehensive Education Plan (CEP). You can join your school's SLT and push for a goal that requires the school to create restorative staffing positions.

Ø Jump to the Assess Your School section for more on how this works.

📖 High School in the Bronx Uses SLT to Hire Deans to Run Peer Mediation –

The SLT at a Bronx high school reached consensus and set a goal in their CEP to shift the school's disciplinary culture from punishment to mediation. As a result, when it came time to build the school-based budget for the year, the school committed to and successfully hired deans to run peer mediations and paid its staff to coordinate restorative practices.





Hiring from the Teacher Budget Line

Because there isn't yet a budget line for "Restorative Justice coordinator," schools can utilize other lines – including simply hiring a licensed teacher to fill the role.

SAMPLE: Restorative Justice Coordinator Job Description –

Responsibilities -

- Be the point person for student conflict:
 - Help students find positive solutions to problems
 - Lead Restorative Justice circles
 - Liaison with parents
 - Lead restorative circles for all students involved in the conflict
 - Help students re-integrate with the community
 - Complete OORS compliance reports
- Oversee the Advisory Program
- Lead weekly grade team advisory planning meetings
- Serve as the advisory curriculum lead (mapping out lessons)
- Support teachers in implementing the advisory curriculum
- Teach advisory and other lessons to students that support social-emotional learning
- Coordinate the Peer Mediation program
- Participate in leader training and facilitate student training
- Create structure for schoolwide peer mediation
- Cabinet/Crisis Team Member
- Meet weekly with administrators and the guidance team to address specific and global school culture issues
- Support teachers through professional development workshops and coaching

Qualifications -

- NY State teaching license (any subject), middle or high school experience
- A deep knowledge of Restorative Justice practices and experience implementing them
- A strong understanding of social-emotional learning in relation to adolescent development
- Training in Restorative Circles/Experience leading circles with students and adults
- Familiarity with Advisory programs and PBIS systems
- Confidence in supporting adult learners
- A passion for working with middle school children and supporting their social/emotional growth
- Knowledge of OORS reporting is helpful but not required

Compensation – This position is a teacher line and will follow the UFT contracted negotiated salary.





📖 Safe & Supportive Opportunity Program Expanded (SSOPE) –

The Safe and Supportive Opportunity Program Expanded (SSOPE) is an initiative of the DOE's Office of School Culture and Climate (formerly the Office of Safety and Youth Development, or OSYD). <u>Since 2016</u>, SSOPE, previously known as the "Safe Schools Initiative," has provided funding to school budgets for a new pedagogical position—a teacher who serves outside of the classroom as the "school culture/community services coordinator."

This teacher works to identify staff to be trained in restorative practices and other progressive discipline supports, facilitate social emotional supports, establish relationships with Community Based Organizations to support the school, and implement regular School Culture Committee meetings among school admin and staff to support the implementation and sustainability of school culture and climate enhancement.

During the 2022-2023 school year, <u>the SSOPE initiative</u> reached 19 schools, contributing an average of \$92,000 directly to the teacher budget line for each school.

Check out the <u>School Allocation Memorandums</u> to find out what kind of opportunities are already out there to get money directly to your school budget to cover Restorative Justice staff.



Hiring from the Community Coordinator Budget Line

There are hundreds of people working as Community Coordinators, Community Associates, and Community Assistants in public schools. Hiring on these "Community" budget lines offers more flexibility in the pathways people take to enter school-based careers.

SAMPLE: Restorative Justice Coordinator Job Description -

Responsibilities -

- Provides services to students, parents, school staff and the community through restorative practices and interventions
- Leads Facilitation of Restorative Justice Circles and Practices (Tier 2) during Study Hall and Town Hall and as needed.
- Implementation of Crisis Intervention strategies.
- Classroom and Workshop Presentations that support Socio-Emotional Learning and growth.
- Maintains and tracks discipline-related records for students based on referrals and incidents (incl. Google Spreadsheets, Reinstatement systems, OORs, etc.).
- School representative/investigator for incidents that may lead to outside of school suspension.





Hiring from the Social Worker Line

Schools also appoint school social workers to the position of Restorative Justice coordinator. School social workers can be well positioned to advocate for the use of Restorative Justice in schools, as Restorative Justice can be understood as a trauma-informed mental health support, to enable people to regain a sense of voice and control, and maintain social connection within their school community. School social workers can build and use restorative practices in work settling conflicts and improving relationships.

SAMPLE: Restorative Justice Coordinator Job Description –

Eligibility Requirements -

- Licensed certified Social Worker in New York City schools.

Duties and Responsibilities -

- Willingness to commit to the school's mission and core beliefs
- Collaborating with staff members on the development of the socio-emotional developing based Advisory curriculum and provide support to teacher-advisors to develop the Advisory program and their skills as advisors
- Counseling students, individually and in groups, regarding discipline, social and emotional development, substance abuse, conflict mediation, and making appropriate referrals
- Developing and maintaining partnerships with participating educational institutions, industry partners, and community-based organizations to support school initiatives including job shadowing, internships, and other academic opportunities
- Providing strategies and work with teachers to promote social and emotional competence in the classroom

Selection Criteria –

- Ability to collaborate with staff and participate in an Advisory program.
- Ability or willingness to develop conflict resolution programs including, but not limited to, Restorative Justice and peer mediation
- Ability to provide strategies to staff in promoting social and emotional competence throughout the school
- Ability to intervene in crisis situations with verbal de-escalation techniques
- Evidence of success leading workshops and discussions with/for parents





🔑 Theme –



"There's so much policing in city schools. The city and state have given so much money towards policing and not to other things."

- High School Student

"The 'old fashioned' way of doing things isn't working. I think that by using Restorative Justice it really is putting back the justice. The *actual* justice, actual positive changes for students."

– High School Student





What It Is –

The role of police is to maintain a violent social order. Organizing for just schools requires questioning ideas of "law," "order," and "public safety" – words people in power use to disguise and excuse police violence and uphold their authority to use physical and deadly force.¹³ When people in power deploy police to schools, they are signaling to school communities—particularly young people—that they must conform.

Sor an introduction to police abolition, check out resources like workshops by <u>Critical Resistance</u> and tools by <u>Interrupting Criminalization</u> (like this "<u>Police</u> <u>Abolition 101: Messages When Facing Doubts</u>" zine).

Each year, city lawmakers choose to spend half-a-billion dollars of public school money on a contract with the NYPD to deploy police in schools. School police threaten young people's wellbeing and access to education. What's more, the Mayor and the NYPD continually introduce new youth policing projects that bring even more police into our schools.

Beyond the NYPD, school policing also refers to all the ways that people in positions of authority attempt to control, punish, and restrict the movement of students, families, and workers. Amongst all this, students, educators, and families have been creative and daring in the ways they've resisted policing and worked to sustain safe schools.

"For parents of students, they are not going to school. For teachers, they could get another job. For students, we have to go to school. For anything, this is going to be impacting *us* directly and hard."

- High School Student

✓ In New York, "compulsory education" laws mandate every young person between the ages of 5 and 17 must attend full-time school. State regulations require local school districts to come up with their own attendance policies. This includes consequences like school disciplinary proceedings, truancy intervention programs, and being placed under court supervision.

¹³ See "No More Police: A Case for Abolition" by Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie. (2022)





Why It Matters –

Consider how policing interferes with the goals of teaching and learning. Here in NYC, as schools are deprived of resources students need to learn and thrive, they are at the same time flooded with police. So policing reaches further and further into our daily interactions:

- → Escalating everyday disagreements between people;
- → Normalizing hostile, antagonistic reactions to students simply arriving to school;
- → Threatening students and families with the weight of the criminal legal system by watching and tracking people's movement.

"Experiencing police in school made me want to be a part of Restorative Justice."

– High School Student

While there have been hard fought-for "reforms" to school policing, politicians often offer us distractions like more "training," more police discretion, and rebranding police through new job titles or outfits. In the face of all of this, school communities imaginatively limit the scope and scale of police in schools – effectively creating their own safety paradigms in their schools.

No you need more talking points to help you have conversations with your school community? Check out <u>Girls for Gender Equity's police-free schools</u> resources (start with "<u>Frequently Asked Questions</u>").





List of Methods –

Concepts –	🧰 Tactics –
Reduce the power of policing:	
Shrink the deployment of police	 → Leverage the loopholes in existing regulations → Use existing governance forums to build consensus against policing → Use your Student Campus Council
Shrink the supply of policing tools (Jump to <u>Resist Scanning</u> for tips on scanners)	 → Influence your school safety committee and school safety plan → Shape the Comprehensive Educational Plan through your SLT → Move your Building Council to change protocols
🔍 Shrink the scope of police reach	 → Push for protocols to make sure SSAs are the last resort → Leverage Principal Discretion → Leverage diversion options and alternate first responders
Sustain the police-free schools we want:	
End practices of control, adopt practices of student autonomy	 → Student Fairness Committees & Town Halls → Students set school rules → Hallways belong to students, not police
Work on synergy between parents/families and school leadership	 → Know how principal power and discretion works in your school → Push your principal about the ways they may be interacting and sharing information with the NYPD
Create spaces for peacekeeping and consciousness raising	 → Build social justice electives → Convene opportunities to learn your rights with police in school → Repurpose your SAVE room as a restorative space for youth





Create Systems for Student Autonomy

School communities can use creative strategies to build democratic processes, redistribute decision-making away from administrative school staff, and reorient the physical look and feel of school.

Source of the students in co-located buildings, jump to Form a Student Campus Council for more ideas on shaping campus policing decisions.

📖 Fairness Committees & Student-Run Town Halls –

At one public high school, students have the autonomy to assemble town hall meetings, facilitate colloquium-style classes, and operate a fairness committee. Students negotiate with school administrators to establish school rules, and discipline is never automatically applied. Conflict is handled through a conflict-resolution process held in the fairness committee.

Any member of the school community can take another person to a fairness committee (where students and teachers may sit on the committee). If a student feels a teacher's classroom policies do not reflect the school values, they can take the teacher to the fairness committee. Fairness committees mean students have control over school rules and an outlet for raising concerns and preventing conflict from escalating.

Periodic town hall meetings are assembled by students to discuss topics chosen by a different student advisory group. A town hall was held on roving metal detectors to understand DOE/NYPD policies and the power of the school.

📖 Hallways Belong To Students –

At another public high school, hallways are designated student lounges. This means that no one—not even school cops (or "SSAs")—can sweep students out of the hallways, or, as happens in some schools, issue students summonses for trespassing.

There is a Student Leadership Team that functions like a student government, where each advisory has one representative who attends weekly SLT meetings, along with the assistant principal. Students relay to the administration their say on school safety and school rules.



Leverage Principal Discretion

A hodgepodge of policies and regulations shape the choices school principals have available to them. Consider the ways that you and others at your school can influence your principal to use their power.

"Figure out how to work with principals, including mentorship for principals on how to not follow the rules of the system through the lens of equity. The NYPD is arguably the most powerful entity in the country... the NYPD is in the principals ear, coming at them... The support coming from the organizing community needs to be more powerful and more steadfast. The political risks directly impact the lives of the folks you're trying to support."

– Parent

"Doing this work in isolation is hard. People want to buy into Restorative Justice but the day to day is hard, and Restorative Justice can feel like it's in conflict with feelings of safety. You have to convince people even when it's not working, it's still better than the alternatives, this allows you the most space for faith and hope. Relationships, the building of relationships, is so important. Have an RJAT [Restorative Justice Action Team] even if it's informal. When I'm struggling, having a group to talk to is crucial."

– Principal

"For staff wanting to work with their principal, say something [to the principal] along the lines of 'I can tell you aren't making these rules, you're doing the best you can. You're in a situation where you have to follow the rules.' It's lonely at the top for principals."

– Principal





📖 Memorandum Of Understanding Between The NYPD & DOE –





The <u>Memorandum of Understanding (MOU</u>) between the NYPD and DOE is an agreement about "school security functions" signed by the two departments and the Mayor.

While you can read the memorandum closely for the precise language, school principals are implicated in a few places:

- The NYPD precinct commander appoints NYPD liaisons to principals of the schools within their precinct.
- The NYPD shall consult with the principal prior to placing a student under arrest, or initiating any form of criminal process, on the property of the principal's school. The NYPD is supposed to take into account any information provided by the principal.
- Principals can disagree with NYPD personnel, and the matter can be escalated to the superintendent and School Safety Division borough commander/civilian/uniformed zone commander, and then even higher up to the Commanding Officer of School Safety and the Chancellor's designee.
- Principals can share grievances about school police, and request a change in the NYPD assigned to the school.

It's important to keep watch as policies can change quickly (and quietly)! We saw this in early 2023, when the Mayor <u>instructed</u> principals to have weekly meetings with their local police precinct commanders, <u>flooding</u> schools with more kinds of NYPD officers.





📖 NYPD Patrol Guide –



There are many kinds of cops that are tasked with policing schools, some of which you can find in the <u>NYPD Patrol Guide</u>. Many of these positions target principals for information. Talk with your principal about the ways they may be interacting and sharing information with the NYPD.

Youth Coordination Officer:

- Visit schools and confer with school principals and school policing personnel.

Community Affairs Officer:

- Visit schools, confer with principals...

Neighborhood Coordination Officer:

- Patrol sector in a manner that reinforces the lines of communication with residents and schools in the sector
- Regularly confer with officials at public institutions (i.e., schools) within the sector
- Visit schools frequently and confer with school principals and school police (aka "School Safety Agents")... When possible, participate in school activities/events...

Neighborhood Coordination Sergeant:

- Regularly confer with school principals, school staff, school policing personnel...
- Regularly participate in school activities/events...
- Visit schools regularly and confer with principals and School Safety Division supervisors regarding school-related conditions.

Special Operations Lieutenant:

- Maintain contact with principals of local schools. Ensure that neighborhood coordination sergeant and youth coordination officer are maintaining contact with these institutions.

The Patrol Guide also outlines processes for interacting with principals on matters of "truancy," handcuffing students in schools, and diversion for "low level, non-violent misdemeanor crimes or violations."





Students & Educators Design Electives to Learn About the School-to-Prison Pipeline

The New York City Public Schools <u>Student Bill of Rights</u> includes the right to be informed about courses and programs that are available in the school and the opportunity to have input in the selection of elective courses. The High School Academic Policy Guide also lays out how students can use "independent study" on topics of interest to them to complete some elective credits. Students and school communities have been creative in building out opportunities for student learning on the school-to-prison pipeline through electives and through independent study.

📖 Elective Class on Punitive Discipline –

"Admin was hands off, and teachers were allowed to teach whatever electives. We had an elective class about suspension in NYC and the discipline code, with a student co-teacher the first year, and a small grant to pay students for student leadership. In the second year we hired back alumni to work on the class."

– Educator, Manhattan Transfer School

The City publishes all kinds of data – see <u>opendata.cityofnewyork.us</u> – on your school that can be used in your curriculum. A disclaimer that we know police manufacture and manipulate data to produce their own narrative, and schools face pressure to do the same.

☑ In 2007, the Student Safety Coalition was formed and ultimately passed the Student Safety Act by the New York City Council. This required the DOE and NYPD to report on student suspensions and police interventions in NYC public schools. The DOE's annual and biannual reports are due each year on October 31st and March 31st respectively, and posted on the DOE's website. NYPD reporting happens quarterly: Data from January 1 to March 31 is due May 1st; data from April 1 to June 30 is due August 1st; data from July 1 to September 30 is due November 1st; and data from October 1 to December 31 is due February 1st. Those reports are posted on the <u>NYPD's website</u>.





Peer Group Connection –

Schools often rely on outside organizations to provide programs where students can engage in political education and go beyond some of the limitations of electives (like aligning with NYSED learning standards).

"We formed a youth council, advisor to a 'Youth Leadership Council,' and a course called 'Peer Group Connection.' Worked with youth as a co-conspirator in organizing students against censorship. Supported students to walkout and hold a rally."

– Educator, Bronx High School

"Peer Group Connection – run by the <u>Center for Supportive Schools</u> – does professional development, and then you can run a program where students run circles and older students mentor younger students. That way we have a few different classes we consider our 'RJ classes."

– Principal, Brooklyn High School





Students Organize "Know-Your-Rights" Workshop & Mobilize a Protest Against Scanning

Mapping out the powers and authority of police in school can help you reduce the scope and presence of police at your school, especially when trying to figure out how to leverage decision-maker discretion to interrupt school policing.

Chancellor's Regulations, for example, use discretionary language in places, and differentiate with words like "must," "may," "should," "will," and so on.

S Jump to the "<u>Tips From Students For Students</u>" section for more advice about how to get adults to support student-led organizing projects like resisting increased police presence.

Learning Your Options With Increasing Policing –

When the NYPD deploys metal detectors to schools (see the "<u>Resist Scanning</u>" section to learn more about scanning) they also send an influx of additional school police to operate the equipment.

When the NYPD showed up for "unannounced scanning" at one high school, a group of students connected with the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) to come in and present a "Know-Your-Rights" workshop about scanning for students. Equipped with that knowledge, the students organized a protest in response to mistreatment by school police during the scanning process. Students were able to circulate information throughout the school through conversations (and pamphlets!) about students' rights, and mobilized the student body to take action together.

Check out the New York Civil Liberties Union's tools for more information about "<u>How to interact with police in New York City public schools</u>."



When & How to File a Complaint Against School Cops

One option when facing school policing is to submit a formal complaint.

Complaints about school police (aka "School Safety Agents") go to the Internal Affairs Bureau of the NYPD, while complaints about police officers go to the Civilian Complaint Review Board, an independent agency. Eligible complaints fall under one or more set categories: Force, Abuse of Authority, Discourtesy, and/or Offensive Language, collectively known as "FADO".

Since the NYPD first began publicly reporting on "FADO" complaints made against school police in 2016, there have been almost 1,000 complaints. You can check out that data through <u>the Student Safety Act here</u>.

You can file a complaint though 311 if a school cop or police officer:

- → Physically assaults you (punching, shoving, kicking, slapping, hair pulling);
- → Uses offensive language; makes comments that make you uncomfortable; or makes comments about your race, religion, gender, accent, national origin, or sexual orientation;
- → Asks for immigration information about you or your family;
- → Disrespects you in some way.

You can contact the New York Civil Liberties Union if you are having trouble with police in school: call 212-607-3300 or email <u>schools@nyclu.org</u>.

Check out the <u>Memorandum of Understanding</u> for more leverage. For example, if principals are not "satisfied" with the performance of the NYPD, they can request a change in the personnel.



Use Discretionary Power & Diversion to Limit the Role of School Cops

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the NYPD and DOE states that "most school-based discipline matters and student behavior are best addressed by school staff," and provides that certain things – such as low-level marijuana possession, disorderly conduct, trespass, harassment, graffiti, and so on – are eligible for diversion to school staff and should not result in NYPD interventions like arrests or summonses. Schools have been creative in how they work within the constraints of the MOU and other rules to reduce some of the harms and threats of police in schools.

"Consider the relationships that the school has with SSAs. There are SSAs who will take the issue to the school team. But the reality still is that the NYPD tells SSAs how they're supposed to respond, and the NYPD tells SSAs to do things in opposition to what the school community wants. Sometimes SSAs will want school staff to help do their job, and we say no."

- Restorative Justice Coordinator

Discretion to Divert Students From SSAs –

At one high school, the principal allows admin and teachers to intervene in interactions between students and school cops (SSAs), and encourages them to use their discretion to diffuse hostile interactions between SSAs and students. School admin reviews how SSAs interact with students, watches for patterns including where conflict happens, and then takes their concerns to SSA supervisors. There is a policy that states that school support staff are always visible in hallways during periods to make sure there is a visible alternative to SSAs to respond to any conflict.

📖 Non-Police First Response –

At another high school, SSAs who are assigned to the building stay at the entrance and aren't assigned any patrol duties. Each grade has a town hall meeting once a week with a team of teachers, aides, and administrators. Aides are relied on for mediation and support, to create a stopgap where SSAs are a last resort. Educators and aides build trust to support students as a first response. Students also work to help connect aides to issues and help prevent conflict from escalating.

Ø Jump to <u>Influence Your School Safety Committee</u> for more ideas on limiting how school police are positioned in your school.







<u>Chancellor's Regulation A-414</u> says that every school must establish a School Safety Committee and develop a school safety plan.

The Regulation requires ("at a minimum") that certain people serve on the Committee: The principal, the UFT Chapter leader, the PT/PTA president (or designee), the school's Level III School Safety Agent (or designee), the custodial engineer (or designee), the dietician (or designee), the NYPD commanding officer of the local precinct (or designee), community members, and a student representative. The Principal may also invite "any other persons deemed appropriate."

State law and <u>Chancellor's Regulation A-414</u> requires principals to hold at least one annual meeting which is open to all parents at that school. The meeting shall be conducted for the purpose of allowing parents to raise and discuss safety concerns regarding the school, including, but not limited to, matters relating to school police.

Chancellor's Regulation A-660 states that the Parent Association and Parent Teacher Association Executive Board has the right to receive an abridged summary of the school safety plan from the principal.





📖 Change Visitor Procedures by Replacing Cops with School Staff –

The School Safety Plan describes, among many things, the school's building entry and "visitor control" procedures.

The NYCDOE's policy does <u>not</u> require that school police are the ones who meet visitors at the door or sign guests in. The main entrance door may be "monitored" by "other appropriately trained staff." The staff member on duty at the main entrance can be the one to follow mandated procedures like recording names. You can organize with others in your school to replace the school cop at the front of the building with a staff member who greets and signs in guests.

Escalate Issues With the School Safety Plan –

UFT chapter leaders can use their Executive Consultation Committee to address issues with the School Safety Committee. Every faculty conference should include time dedicated to safety issues and/or procedures as outlined in the school safety plan, including crisis response and student removal procedures. Regulation A-414 also lays out what to do if there's a violation of the safety plan and the complaint is not resolved with the principal.

🔧 You can check out a sample <u>complaint form here</u>.





Leverage Your School Leadership Team

As explained in <u>Assess Your School</u>, every public school has a School Leadership Team (SLT). Outside of working together to develop the school's Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP), the SLT is a forum where issues specific to the school community can be addressed jump back for more examples of leveraging your SLT.

Check out "<u>Schools Are Us</u>" for more information about SLTs and how they relate to all the levels of school decision making in New York City.

Creating SLT Subcommittees for School Safety –

At an elementary school, the SLT formed an "Advocacy Committee" to discuss safety. This operated as a subcommittee of the SLT, so the team met separately and frequently. Teachers on the committee worked with parents and collaboratively built out a political education process that kept the committee running and brought people into meetings.

"The Advocacy Committee had regular meetings, rotating facilitators and roles, shared notes, and met in person. Organizing feels easy once the structures and relationships are there."

– Parent







Influence Your Building Council (& Student Campus Council)

Chancellor's Regulation A-190 establishes "Building Councils" in all public school buildings where two or more schools are co-located.

"Safety and Security" is an agenda item at all Building Council meetings. The Building Council is expected to work with the NYPD, and potentially identify a lead administrator to the Safety Team. That lead administrator is told to hold regular meetings with school police (SSAs) and talk each morning about what's going on at the school – including discussing SSA daily deployment. That administrator also coordinates the meetings of the School Safety Committee (*jump to "Influence Your School Safety Committee*"), and "ensures adherence" to Chancellor's Regulation A-414.

Campuses can also form a "Student Campus Council" (SCC), which can then be used to bring student demands to the Building Council to improve campus culture. Student representatives from the SCC can advocate for students' interests across the campus and influence campus decisions around policing.

📖 Limit Police Patrols on Shared Campuses –

It's suggested that Building Council administrators hold a "morning muster meeting" prior to school opening each day to talk to SSAs about deployment and concerns, including "floor patrol schedules."

This is an opportunity for school leaders to set expectations and limitations on the role of police in school. For example, in one Bronx high school on a shared campus, SSAs were not assigned to patrol hallways or staircases, but were mandated to remain at a stationary post. School staff were assigned to hallways during the time between class periods to help be visible and available to students.

We know that when metal detectors are deployed to schools, school police are deployed with them. Principals on a shared campus may submit a request to change scanning by first conferring with their Building Council. Jump to the <u>Resist Scanning</u> section for more or <u>check out the process here</u>.

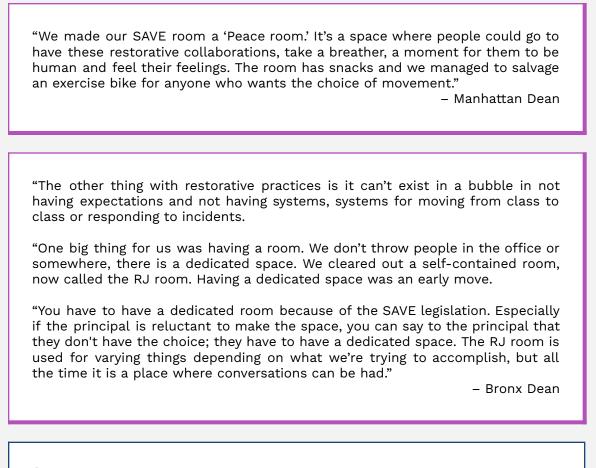




Repurpose Your "SAVE" Room

In the year 2000, New York State passed the SAVE Act (Safe Schools Against Violence in Education) creating "classroom removals" and giving teachers the authority to remove students from their classrooms. As part, "The school authorities of any school district shall establish policies and procedures to ensure the provision of continued educational programming and activities for students removed" – creating "SAVE Rooms."

These areas can become a dedicated space, outside of the patrol of school police, and can limit the movement and reach of school police and help with de-escalation.



🔧 Check out <u>New York Education Law § 3214</u> for context.







RESIST SCANNING

Maybe the NYPD conducts scanning at your school every day, or you've heard they have plans to start. Or maybe they recently started showing up without warning to scan students on seemingly random days. In all of these cases, **there are ways that students**, families, and school staff can push back against scanning and insist on restorative approaches that build meaningful safety at school.

What It Is –

Since the 1980s, scanning has been one of the methods the NYPD has used to police young people at school, right from the moment they step in the building. There are three types of scanning that every public high school and middle school can be subjected to:

- 1. Some schools have *full-time scanning*, which means metal detectors are installed, and students are scanned every day.
- 2. Others have *random scanning*, where students are scanned some days during the week, but not every day.
- 3. Any high school or middle school that does not have regular scanning carried out by school police (SSAs) may be selected for *unannounced scanning*, which is conducted by a mobile unit of the NYPD who brings the equipment to the school day-of. The NYPD selects schools at random, according to their own metrics, or in response to a request. The principal is the only member of the school community who is notified in advance of unannounced scanning, and they are instructed not to inform others.

✤ For more context, check out <u>Scanning Protocols in NYC DOE Schools</u>, a document made public following the demands of advocates.



Why It Matters -

→ Scanning Violates the Dignity of Students

"Scanning violates the safety and dignity of students. We as students should be able to attend our school without having to feel dread about going inside in the morning or when there is a fire drill. This feeling is even worse for students of color."

- High School Student

"The metal detector scan is disorganized and messy, resulting in all of the children being crammed into one section of the lunchroom. In some cases, students must wait outside in the cold, even in harsh weather conditions. This not only causes them to be late but also puts them at risk of becoming ill. Students develop grudges towards the police who are scanning, and the school, because they feel violated and are treated suspiciously."

- High School Student

→ Scanning Compromises Access to Education

"Another reason we must eliminate scanning is because it disrupts learning. There are constant wait times to go to school due to the long lines to go through scanning. It has gotten to the point where students will purposely miss school or come late to school in order to avoid these long lines – this ultimately affects their education."

- High School Student

→ Scanning is Arbitrary and Discriminatory

"It's demotivating to be stopped by the scanner every morning because of one ring I wear. I remember being annoyed the first time they stopped me because I was already late and the scanner was going to make me even later. I was agitated because they were so focused on me and my ring, despite the fact that the late bell to first period was about to ring. The whole scanning situation didn't make sense to me... I was angry and frustrated. I recall going to first period with only five minutes remaining. Because of the scanner, I missed the entire lesson. This cannot happen every day. It must come to an end."



"Every day we as students are forced to surrender our personal items away such as drinks and electronics because they are "dangerous" in their eyes. This behavior makes me feel overwhelmed. I feel as if they think of me as a hazard." - High School Student

"I have been stopped many times by the school scanning for small things like bringing in a coffee or any open drink. Still, on one particular occasion I got stopped for bringing in cologne. There are two scanners at my school and the scanner I was stopped at was delayed just because of that cologne. I stood there mad and confused as to why I couldn't bring a cologne in because it is "dangerous." We need to get priorities straight."

- High School Student

→ Scanning distracts from creating real solutions

"Instead of using scanning, we should develop better ways to make our schools safe that actually work, and which don't violate students' dignity every time we come to school, but instead, make us feel respected and welcome." - High School Student



Keep in mind the inspiring legacy of students who have taken action to resist scanning – like in <u>1982</u> when students in Brooklyn walked out and successfully resisted the City's first attempt to place metal detectors in schools. Or in <u>2005</u> when 1,500 Bronx students marched to DOE offices to demand newly installed metal detectors be removed.

List of Methods –

How you choose to resist scanning at your school will depend on various factors, such as whether your school has full-time or unannounced scanning, shares a building with other schools, or has admin who are willing to support students.

Below are accounts from NYC students, educators, and caregivers who organized to resist scanning either by preventing full-time scanning from being introduced at their school, removing existing full-time scanning, or supporting students to exercise their right to refuse scanning—whether it be full-time or unannounced.

Being in a shared building can require extra navigation to get scanners removed or block their installation. Jump back to "<u>Influence Your Building</u> <u>Council</u>" for tips on how to navigate campus bureaucracy.

🔧 Students also use their school newspaper to draw attention to the issue:

- → One citing a school questionnaire and student polling to raise awareness on the issue.
- → <u>One citing the Chancellor's Regulations so students know their rights</u>.
- → One naming the impact on students' feelings of safety and whether their rights were violated.





In this account, a teacher at a transfer school in Manhattan shares how they organized with their chapter to resist metal detectors from becoming a permanent fixture at the school. The NYPD had introduced scanning the day after a weapon had been found on campus, and on the heels of a stressful period for the school community that had seen a spike in covid case and increased conflict among some students.

Teachers worked together on a plan to build restorative practices and culture at the school. They had identified the lack of restorative culture as a factor in the breakdown of the school community's sense of safety and trust. We spoke to this teacher as their organizing work was still unfolding.

- 1. The teacher used restorative practices in staff meetings. They found success in shifting the focus of the discussion away from a debate over scanning and towards finding solutions to the root issues—this was something everyone could get behind.
 - → The same day that the NYPD introduced scanning, school staff had a meeting. Tensions were high and the teacher was concerned that the meeting could turn into a free-for-all shouting match, so they recommended they go in a circle and pass a talking piece. This was an effective format: "The circle discussion helped keep the sort of tone and vibes among the staff better than they would have been otherwise."
 - → Among the staff in the meeting, it was about a 50-50 split between those who supported and those who opposed scanning. The teacher was (pleasantly) surprised at how many people opposed scanning.
 - → During this meeting, the teacher shared that they are personally against scanning, but chose to focus more on the root issues that scanning is only a bandaid for. The teacher made an effort to take the emphasis off scanning and focus the discussion on the root issues. This way, scanning no longer becomes the issue or the only solution.
- 2. Teachers organized as a chapter. They outlined a detailed proposal that focused on building restorative practices and culture to address the root causes of the conflict and mistrust in the school community that had led to scanning.
 - → The teacher gathered other educators who had been organizing together earlier in the year to improve their chapter.



- → At chapter meetings, the group asked their colleagues what changes they think the school needed in order to build trust and safety. They solicited ideas and took notes. Together, this group of teachers put together a 14-point document that outlined changes they wanted to see at the school. Some of the demands the teachers came up with included: form a Restorative Justice Action Team (RJAT); hire a Restorative Justice coordinator; more clarity on the ladder of referral, consequences, and supports for students; and greater focus on Restorative Justice in crew.
 - → This all came about without the help or support of the chapter leader.
- 3. Teachers had one-on-one conversations with colleagues to gather signatures and support for the proposal, which they then presented to their principal at Consultation Committee.
 - → The group then took their 14-point document around to other staff and gathered signatures of support in preparation for the upcoming Consultation Committee meeting. The goal was to get as many signatures as possible. In cases where staff were on the fence about supporting the demands, the teachers in the group had one-on-one conversations to move them from a maybe to a yes. Through this process, the group got around 90% of UFT members at the school to sign on to the 14-point demands.
 - The teacher noted that they could have done a better job engaging with other non-UFT staff during this process.
 - → At Consultation Committee, the group presented the 14-point document, which was now signed by 90% of UFT members, to the principal.
 - → There is a sense among staff that, while the principal supported Restorative Justice in principle, she would not have the capacity or the will to make it happen. Staff felt strongly that if this proposal was to become a reality, they would need to be the driving force.
 - → The following week, the teacher reviewed the 14-point proposal and drafted a list of the roles that would be needed to make it happen: Crew Advisory Coaches, people to turn-key professional learning, various roles to implement Restorative Justice, and so on. The teacher shared this with the people they had been organizing with and got commitments from individuals to take on the various roles.
 - → This is still ongoing.





- In this story, a school community came together after the NYPD installed metal detectors with no input from or warning to the school communities on a shared campus. 500 students walked out of school demanding that the metal detectors be removed. Their action was successful: the metal detectors were removed the very next week.
- First, a handful of students decided to start organizing on the second day of scanning. Students went to <u>YA-YA Network</u>, a nearby training center for young activists with strong connections to the school community. The students came up with a strategy of getting to school early each day that week and passing out flyers to build for something bigger.

"At my school, Restorative Justice is to have a sit-down meeting with teachers and students to resolve the situation, rather than just punishment. With the metal detectors, as soon as you get to the lobby, they're going through your bag, and they're going to punish you if you do have a "weapon" on you—instead of having a sit-down and finding out why you have this "weapon" or this butter knife. It's definitely contradicting our values."

- 2. Students invited a representative from NYCLU to facilitate a meeting with about 50 students from the various schools. At the meeting, students talked about their experiences of police harassment. Many felt that their school had been turned into a prison, as opposed to a safe refuge from the violence that many experienced in their neighborhoods.
 - \rightarrow At the meeting, students also debated among themselves over how to respond.
 - → Students talked through various ideas, from contacting the media to asking permission from the administration.
 - → Some students came into the meeting with a plan to have a sit-in in their hallway, where they would read out statistics on the school-to-prison pipeline.
 - \rightarrow In the end, everyone agreed on a walkout.





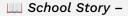
"They went from individual frustration and resignation to feeling that this was a collective experience that someone was willing to listen to [...] It was one of the most moving experiences of my career."

- School Counselor

"For me, to be sitting in a room with students throughout the campus was a perfect opportunity to let them know about the protest and figure out a time, as well as collect [information]."

- During the walkout, students started marching around the block, chanting, carrying homemade signs with messages like: "We do not consent to random searches," and "A little 'Good Morning' goes a long way."
 - → When students attempted to end the protest and return to classes, they were told that all 500 would have to go through the metal detectors. After much chanting and negotiation, the students were able to enter without going through scanning.
- 4. This initial win paved the way for the complete removal of the scanners the following week, a victory that was celebrated throughout the campus.
- 5. Administrators recognized the significance of how the protest brought unity across their different schools. They have now set up a student advocacy committee that brings together student representatives from each school once a month.





Students Organize a Mural Project to Protest Scanners

Faced with a catalyzing event, one school community came together to create a mural to protest police violence. Though the metal detectors are still in place at this campus, this school modeled for schools citywide that building intergenerational consensus within a school is possible.

"[The mural] represents so much to each of us and other schools. But we don't want it to just represent our school; it has to be so big that it inspires other schools and creates a domino effect."¹⁴

- High School Student

- 1. After a highly publicized event in which school police assaulted a student during morning scanning, students came together to plan a response. They wanted to dismantle scanning.
- 2. The principal, teachers, and parents supported students in wanting the scanners removed. However the other schools in the building were not on the same page.
- 3. Led by students, with the support and collaboration of parents and educators, the team worked with a muralist collective and an artist to design and paint a mural inside the school.
- 4. The team planned an event to unveil the mural, bringing community members together for an afternoon of awareness raising and protest.
- 5. <u>The school PTA started a petition</u> to remove scanners, and highlighted the pandemic, Department of Health guidance, and the need "to allow the free and safe movement of children in the building," as factors that made it all the more urgent to remove scanning.
- 6. The team <u>built out a website</u> and garnered press coverage for their efforts.

¹⁴ See coverage at School Stories:

http://school-stories.org/2016/03/building-a-student-movement-one-paint-stroke-at-a-time/







Principals have a lot of power when it comes to scanning. Below is some advice that three principals shared about ways that they exercise their power to support students who don't want to be scanned.

If you are a principal, you might find some useful information that you can use. If you are a student, a parent/caregiver, or a teacher, you might use this information to come up with a plan to work with your principal and come up with a protocol that better supports students to resist scanning.

📖 Principals Can Submit a Request to Remove Scanners –

A principal at a school with permanent scanning can submit a request to remove scanners. However, the NYPD and DOE have created an intentionally arduous process, which ultimately comes down to NYPD approval.

The process requires consultation with members of the School Safety Committee, School Leadership Team (SLT), UFT Chapter, teachers, school staff, students, parents, school police (SSAs), Superintendents, and the Borough Safety Director.

W Read more about this process here: <u>Scanning Protocols in NYC DOE Schools</u>.

At one school, a teacher rallied their extended community to show up to the building on the day that NYPD leadership set up their meeting to convince school principals to accept the new placement of metal detectors – demonstrating solidarity with the school principals and lining the hallways in silent protest of scanning.



📖 Principals Can Divert Students From Scanning –

There are ways principals can help stop scanning. For example, **if a student declines scanning, the principal can allow the student to go directly into school**. Under no circumstances should a student who declines to be scanned be denied admission to school. It is at the principal's discretion how the student should be admitted to school.

Principals must also be present at scanning or they can designate someone else. If a principal or designee is not present at scanning, students might have to wait for a principal or assistant principal. If your principal/assistant principal is not there, you can ask to wait. For principals or their designees, it's important to be diligent – let the police know you are there and you are watching.

Read more about <u>Regulation of the Chancellor A-432 here</u>. Sections A-432(II)(A)(2-3) are cited above.

📖 Principals Can Use Discretion With the Discipline Code –

Everyone in the school community should read the discipline code to understand where there is nuance and discretion. For each infraction, there is a "range of possible disciplinary responses." Students and advocates have fought to win language in the discipline code that takes "mitigating factors," into consideration.

For example, when objects that have multiple purposes like nail files are flagged by scanners, the principal must consider whether there are mitigating factors present before discipline. Even then, principals have discretion to use "supports and interventions" alongside a spectrum of responses – like having the leeway to use an "in-school disciplinary response" rather than a suspension. It is explicitly written in the discipline code that "school officials should exhaust less severe disciplinary responses in conjunction with supports and interventions."

Fread the discipline code <u>online here</u>. Students have a right to receive a written copy of the code early in the school year.





Students Exercise Their Right to Decline Scanning

As a student, you have a right to decline scanning. Exercising this right does not come without risk.

For some context, read <u>Chancellor's Regulation A-432</u>: <u>Search and Seizure</u>. Per II(A)(3): Persons who refuse to cooperate with the scan will be referred to the principal/designee for appropriate action. Under no circumstances should a student who refuses to cooperate be denied admission or sent home.

Knowing your rights will help you to make informed decisions about how and whether you decline scanning. Having this knowledge is helpful as you consider the risks and potential collateral consequences, like changes to your attendance record or your disciplinary record.

The New York Civil Liberties Union has created a tool outlining your rights when facing metal detectors in schools. <u>Check it out here</u>.

Knowledge is power! You can request to have someone from NYCLU come to your school and share Know-Your-Rights trainings with students. Email <u>schools@nyclu.org</u>.

If you feel school police (SSAs) or staff have violated your rights, you can contact NYCLU for help at that same contact – <u>schools@nyclu.org</u>.

Sump to <u>Students Organizing to Know Their Rights</u> in the <u>Interrupt School</u> <u>Policing</u> section for more advice about how to bring students together to learn your rights as students in school.





STRATEGIES & TOOLS

So far, we've covered five kinds of changes you can make at your school: implement restorative practices; actualize culturally responsive sustaining curriculum; hire restorative staff; interrupt school policing; and resist scanning. Within each of those sections, we've looked at tactics, strategies, and lessons learned from school community members about how they carried out their organizing work. When it comes down to it, organizing with others within your community is an act that builds and sustains relationships. The following section offers tips and tools that you can apply to any organizing goal.

Strategies and tools will grow as we put this toolkit into practice and identify what we need to grow our impact. Come to an <u>upcoming cohort</u> <u>meeting</u> to join a community of teachers, students, and families organizing at their school site.





🔧 Strategies & Tools –

ONE-ON-ONES

When organizing, it's important to think about *who* you're going to talk to, and *how* you're going to talk to them. An organizing conversation, while similar to a social chat or a work vent, is distinctly different.

"An effective 1:1 is 80% listening, 20% talking. This is different from the electoral approach. Usually there's a pitch and an ask. Instead, here we ask 'What's an issue for you?' and focus on listening and building connections.

"For example, the focus should be on building relationships and learning more about how the school functions and what people think and feel... Don't preach; just assess.

"Teachers, you don't have to be a chapter leader or delegate to take a pulse on issues & talk to people."

- Educator

A one-on-one chat is used to talk to people, build relationships, and elicit ideas and solutions – it should focus on relationship organizing, not just some "ask" alone.

Check out "<u>An Introduction to 1-on-1 Organizing Conversations</u>" from the *Fire with Fir*e blog.

Done right, an organizing conversation will lead to action. Your job is mostly to ask questions. Instead of telling someone something, ask the right questions that help lead them to say it themselves.

"One-on-ones are one of the best ways for us to get to know other potential leaders; identify their background, skills, and their stake in our fight. Most importantly, they are ways for us to build relationships with other potential leaders as all organizing at its core is a network of relationships."

> - HEAL Together Toolkit for Organizing Your Community





Labor Notes offers the following structure for organizing conversations -

1 Discover the issues

2 Agitate

3 Lay the blame

4 Make a plan to win

5 Get a commitment

6 Inoculate and recommit

7 Set up a follow-up plan

Successful Organizer.

"Grab a friend, grab somebody, start going to your PA meetings, go to your SLT meetings, go to PEP meetings, take a look at your parent groups online, go where conversations are happening, talk to parents at drop off or pick up, at the playground, find your people."

– Parent

K For more, read "<u>The 1:1 Meeting</u>" from Organizing: People, Power, Change by Leading Change Network.





Bronx High School Students Organize a School Walkout to Demand Covid Safety Measures During the Pandemic

At a high school in the Bronx, students used one-on-ones to strategically build a broad base across different grades and across student groups.

The organizers stress the importance of being strategic about communication. While many tools were used to get the word out (like flyers), the one-on-one conversations allowed for organizers to get a pulse on how their peers were feeling, moved people into (or closer to) the core, and ensured a wider & more representative base. This is the main tactic they used to get huge participation for their action.

These relational conversations created space for collective solutions to arise (ie: the idea of a walkout), and also allowed for opportunities to inoculate against administrative fearmongering and misinformation.

1 Discover the Issues

"COVID cases were rising, schools weren't doing shit... the tension around that was rising. Everyone was anxious. We were having conversations we needed to have [as students]. That led to us considering the possibility of a walkout, saying 'maybe this is something we want to consider."

- High School Student

2 Agitate

"At first, I connected to students I thought would be interested in helping organize a walkout for our school.... We built the core group that will get everyone involved. We got all the grades [represented in the core group] so we can tap into all the grades....

"At first it felt like we weren't getting momentum."



3 Lay the blame

"Admin and other staff were pushing against us."

"We printed flyers, posted around the school in the places staff didn't walk around but students did. Some got taken down by staff. We strategically placed them at the last stall... and in a staircase that a lot of students use but staff don't use much."

- High School Student

4 Make a plan to win

"There were two of us who were completely okay about getting in trouble. When we went to admin, the two of us went and we didn't mention any names. There are a lot of people who don't have the ability to drop school and walk out. We had to be conscious of that. We both knew the risk we were getting into and we chose to take that risk."

- High School Student

5 Get a commitment

"I think most of the people who walked out out did so because we talked to them directly. We appealed to what they are interested in. Some people just want to get out of the school. They are important too – they help make up the numbers. Others have safety concerns, we talked to get them on board."

- High School Student

6 Inoculate and re-commit

"We reached out to students in person. We used big spaces, like classes. We could share about it in a way where teachers didn't have to know about it.

"In GSA, we connected the walkout to what we were talking about – queer health."



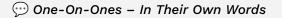


7 Set up a follow up plan

"All the work is really interconnected. It is important to connect different types of work [so people stay ready to take action]. My first walkout was for climate justice. Then organizing for police-free schools....

"[When you maintain relationships] know who you should talk to. Sometimes it's a waste of your time to try to convince someone. Know where to put your energy. Be strategic about who you are bringing in. Know what fights to fight."





Manhattan High School Educator Builds a Foundation for Removing New Permanent Scanners

Following a school safety incident that led to the placement of metal detectors in the high school, an educator recommended school staff talk in circle. Following that circle, the educator established that the school was split on the issue of whether scanning should continue. They began bringing more people together who had already been organized, and pivoted to talking to people one-on-one and to take note of what people in the school community thought was needed.

1 Discover the issues

"We had a full staff list and divided up staff members to talk to based on who had existing relationships...

"We asked about how people were feeling in general, how they were feeling about the responses of different entities (admin, UFT chapter leader, etc.), what their main concerns were, and what kind of changes they wanted to see at school. We presumed in the conversations that most people wanted some kind of change at school, but tried to keep it open-ended as to what."

- High School Educator

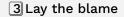
2 Agitate

"We did ask directly about scanners, but not primarily to confront them about it. We asked them open-ended questions, why they thought what they thought, what they thought the impacts would be, how it would work, and how effective it would be at solving the problems we had identified in the conversation.

"Scanners are divisive. If we're going to overcome the principal's lack of inertia, we're going to need everybody on board. We have to stick together if we want anything to happen."

- High School Educator







"Given people's concerns (about other staff and about institutional response), one of the key questions we asked was 'what would you need to see to feel confident that we can make the changes we need?'

"Some were hopeful and optimistic about the work we were doing to compile staff demands, others expressed that they needed to see more fundamental behavior change from other staff or from admin in order to feel confident in the ability to make changes."

- High School Educator

4 Make a plan to win

"It would be easy to have people get out of this that we had a crisis and nothing is changing. It depends on us following through on this consultative process. Demonstrating to them that we are delivering something."

- High School Educator

5 Get a commitment

"If we'll have any hope of clawing ourselves out of this situation, we can't be divided. It is uncomfortable to argue against scanning but not do so in a way that will alienate coworkers because I need to be able to get solutions. People bring different mental calculus to this."

- High School Educator

6 Inoculate and re-commit

"From an organizing and relationship standpoint, it is necessary that we hear [from the] people who wanted scanners; we need to hear what they need to feel safe and what they trust from the process."

- High School Educator





7 Set up a follow up plan

"We had 1:1s with everyone we could... We did make some assessments of a handful of staff we thought would be totally uninterested in RJ/restorative practice responses to the situation. We saw this work as moving some people to yes; and with other people, easing their sense of division and antagonism with staff and the school overall.

"We need to demonstrate that [what we want] will happen, and hold the principal's feet to the fire, and out-organize."

- High School Educator



🔧 Strategies & Tools –

CRAFT AN EFFECTIVE MESSAGE

Figuring out how you will talk about a problem at your school and the solutions you seek is key to any organizing efforts. There are some basic (tested and research-backed) principles you can apply to your talking points to more effectively bring others in, get a school community on your side, and persuade your targets.

Lead first with shared values, not problems.

Narratives that first link to shared values are more effective at shifting opinions towards your solution. Starting with values creates broad points of agreement and shared goals with your target audience. Speak to widely held values like community, fairness, safety, education, and dignity. Most people believe that children should have access to a safe, welcoming school where they can thrive.

Frame the issue as the result of deliberate actions and decisions.

Introduce the problem after the shared value, and make sure it has a clear origin – describe who the villain is behind the problem. Use verbs like 'choose' or 'decide' to characterize what decision makers have done or seek to do. To believe a problem can be fixed through human action, people must believe human action caused it.

Call out efforts to divide us, and show the power of joining together as young people, educators, and parents.

Name that some people in power create problems, and then divide us by blaming others for the consequences their own interests have created. In your call to action, explicitly reject division and demonstrate strength in unity.

Focus on what we are for – as opposed to what we are against.

Lead with a positive vision for the future that is grounded in shared values and paints a picture of what we will achieve. Don't just denounce whatever the other side is doing! Frame our goal in terms of working with people to make something good, rather than merely to erase something bad.

These tips are derived from "<u>Messaging This Moment: A Handbook for</u> <u>Progressive Communicators</u>" authored by the Center for Community Change.





💬 Craft An Effective Message – In Their Own Words

Mobilizing to Influence the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP)

In early 2023, a proposal was brought before the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP) to relocate a school to a different building across the city, swapping locations with another school. The school has "deep community connections, built over decades" who collectively mobilized to resist the relocation, garnering a flurry of media attention and the backing of local elected officials. School community members built messaging tools to shape the narrative and bring more of the community into the work to stop the relocation.

Check out how some of their messaging fit into the formula:

- Lead first with shared values, not problems.
 - → "This school serves disproportionate numbers of students who need unconditional love, care, resources, and support."
 - → "This school has a multi-generational legacy building community and serving as a second home for young people."
- Frame the issue as the result of deliberate actions and decisions.
 - → "The Chancellor, Panel for Educational Policy, and Department of Education is disregarding these factors in its thoughtless, disrespectful, inequitable, and dangerous decision to relocate the school."
 - → "The inequality is glaring. Instead of supporting the school, the Department of Education has failed."
- Call out efforts to divide us, and show the power of joining together as young people, educators, and parents.
 - "Instead of switching school sites, both schools should be given the resources and supports they need to thrive, grow, heal, and care for their communities. This is an invitation to be in solidarity as schools, to demand a different building, to say 'not in our name."
- ☆ Focus on what we are for as opposed to what we are against.
 - → "If you know anything about this school, know this: we don't give up! Not on our students and not on our community."
 - → "You have an opportunity to support our most marginalized youth and help this city be a better city."





Building the Narrative Power of "Policing-Free Schools"

Check out the tool from the Dignity in Schools Campaign New York (DSC-NY) – <u>Messaging Guide: Building Power for</u> <u>Restorative Justice in NYC Public</u> <u>Schools</u> – that offers practices for talking about police-free schools by leading with Restorative Justice and values like belongingness and dignity.

The guide outlines the narrative framework and key messaging principles to effectively build power for safe, welcoming, police-free schools. Our goal is to use messaging that fires up our base and persuades the middle.

HIRE NEW YORKERS TO STRENGTHEN SCHOOLS		
VALUE	When students arrive at school, they should be greeted by community members and teachers, not police.	
VILLAIN	But for years, the NYPD and school police union have successfully pressured lawmakers to direct school funds into hiring and training school police who harm Black, Brown, disabled, and TGNC young people.	
VISION	NYC lawmakers should instead fund school- based jobs that support students, contribute to the safety of our school communities, and which hire Black and Brown community members and pay them well.	
ACTION	Join students, families, and educators on to call for a budget that moves money from school policing and towards hiring 2,000 Black and Brown New Yorkers to build safe, strong school communities!	

The DSC-NY messaging guide derives best practice from tools like <u>We Make</u> <u>the Future's Race Class Narrative Action</u> –

Messaging Guidance for Restorative Justice and Rethinking Discipline:

This guide exists to support advocates, educators, administrators, and allies in making the case to fund the programs and resources that make our schools safe for all while eliminating the police presence that directly impedes learning.

Messaging Guidance for Safe and Equitable Schools:

This guide exists to support educators, administrators, and advocates in making a persuasive case for resourcing public education to provide a safe, equitable and quality education for all students.





🔧 Strategies & Tools –

BY & FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

"We are students who know the issues, who know schools and who are the ones experiencing the issues in schools, daily."

– High School Student

High school students experienced in school-site organizing came together to facilitate and participate in four separate youth focus groups to build out the following offerings:

Contents –

Their goal for this toolkit is to find out more about "what we can learn and experience and how we can move forward for the new generations that will come to the schools that we went to." As young people practicing Transformative Justice, students note that we can talk with our parents and families about how important it is for us. We can get parents involved in our schools, and what is seen as a teacher-focused government. Ultimately, students must be a part of making decisions and "not to be afraid to ask for things."

"Some kids are conditioned to think 'oh we're not allowed to do that,' but what if you are? What if you can make it work? Don't feel intimidated, don't feel shy. Get it out there."

– High School Student





ORGANIZING TIPS FROM STUDENTS FOR STUDENTS

"We know common issues that NYC public schools face. While reviewing some of the key tips from students, especially for students looking to try organizing other students for the first time, look towards some of the students who have done this kind of work." It's really important to have first hand accounts and experiences.

For students who have a lot of experience, show how passionate we are about making a change for the better for students and share how we want others to join us."

– Student Toolkit Team Members

🟗 Build A Base –

"First step in thinking about organizing is having a base. Your base doesn't have to be a specific group that meets about a particular issue. It could be different student groups: GSA, young Transformative Justice group, student council... These groups have different goals in mind, but are all working towards collective liberation."

"People talk to their people. As a 10th grader I was able to talk to 10th graders, others were able to talk to 11th graders, and so on."





"Know where to put your energy. Be strategic. Know what fights to fight."

📌 Connect Issues –

"[It's] important to connect different types of work. Everything is related. It seems like it's not really connected, but these are all things that students want. For example, GSA is not directly related to climate change. But whenever there is a group of students organizing around whatever, I promise there will be at least one person interested. In GSA we connected our walkout to what we were talking about: queer health. That led to a convo about sexual health, mental health, transitioning, pandemic... A lot of trans folks had to cancel surgeries, didn't have access to hormones. Other [students] have safety concerns-family is immunocompromised, or they are. We got them on board."

👫 Have Conversations! But Know Who You Should Talk To –

"Sometimes it's a waste of your time to try to convince someone. The time spent trying to convince someone could be spent getting 4 people to show up. Underrepresented communities, use your privilege to bring them in. Build relationships with adults. They are gonna come in handy."

🌋 Use Restorative Justice (RJ) To Navigate Conflict & Strengthen Relationships –

"I use RJ through any difficulties as a whole. If there's anything wrong, or any conflict between others, I try to use things that I learned from [our Transformative Justice Coordinator] or from Circles that we do and things that we do every day to apply to that situation. The biggest thing is communication. I would communicate with that person: how are they feeling, why are they feeling that way, what is the problem and how do we get past this to where we can be where things are good and things are better than before. Meaning, things aren't back to the same old same old. Things have shifted between the parties to make it even better than it was before."





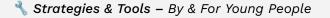
陀 Trust The Work –

"In a student walk-out I helped organize, at first it felt like we weren't getting momentum. But on the day, all these students walked out who I thought wouldn't walk out."

🚧 Know The Risk –

"There are a lot of people who don't have the ability to do direct action like drop school and walk out. We have to be conscious of that. We knew the risk we were getting into and we chose to take that risk."





TIPS FOR ORGANIZING WITH ADULTS

"At the end of the day we are the ones experiencing the impact of school rules. While parents and teachers are hearing it from us, we are the main people impacted. So, it is important to build a good support system around us, and get more people involved – adults included."

– Student Toolkit Team Members

🎯 Know Your Targets –

"In my organizing, I think there were a couple adults on board, there was my advisor, originally the dean, instead of punishment he did Restorative Justice, then there was a music teacher, he like had a position as a dean after because of the work that he did first, which was starting an afterschool club for social justice, we also had to work with the assistant principal who had to deal with what comes after the dean."

"Sometimes the principals and the dean will be involved because of power, you have to try to figure out how to include all the other faculty and build those relationships."

"Opposition looks different: sometimes the people against your work are the teachers, and sometimes opposition looks like teachers not getting involved, and sometimes opposition looks like adults stopping things."



"Try to understand that not every adult in the room is working against you. You have to trust that they are working with you and you're working together for a common cause."

Build Power! Include As Many Students As You Can!

"When organizing with adults, including as many students as you can is the best."

"Make sure students have a chance to speak up around adults."

"Make sure that everyone feels like their voice is heard."

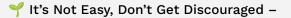
🗧 Ask For What You Want –

"Don't be afraid to ask for certain things... You may be surprised by how adults have resources that students don't have or don't know about. If adults can't answer the question, they may be able to find someone who does, or they know someone who is an expert."

"Don't be afraid to ask. Schools have so many people who're ready to help and people are connected with each other. If you want to work on something, someone is going to know another person who's going to want to help."

"You have to really try to advocate for what YOU want. Teachers or adults might take things a different way, so you've gotta make sure that you're speaking to what it is you want!"





"Trying to understand each other can be hard. We are talking to other people from another generation, who were kids from another time. The issues that we face might be really different for them. So, building that connection and making sure that your voice is heard is really important. Use your voice and use details and really say what it is you mean."

"There's definitely going to be people who are like, 'no, I don't want to be a part of that."

"It's important to seek out and confide in the teachers that you know you can. There are definitely some teachers that you are more comfortable with. Of course that doesn't mean there's any malice, but it's okay to not feel comfortable with some people - you know yourself best. Give people a chance but in the end it's really up to you."

"I've worked with such amazing people, including adults. It's been amazing how people have made things happen and made things work and I think that's pretty cool."



Strategies & Tools – For Educators

TIPS FOR ORGANIZING WITH STUDENTS FROM STUDENTS FOR THEIR TEACHERS

High school students experienced in school-site organizing came together to facilitate and participate in four separate youth focus groups to build out the following offerings for their teachers:

? How should teachers support student-led organizing -

"When I look at my Transformative Justice team or my Restorative Justice team, the thing that allows me to be comfortable and depend on adults is that I just having the space, somethings we don't have control over space, using the dance room for example, using the power teachers have to allow us the space is the first step."

"Using their resources, being able to network, being a part of the planning, they get another teacher who wants to be involved, using their connections to support us, even if that's going against what that principal might have in mind, that is big."

"The biggest thing is having the freedom to decide how to move forward, usually asking for support happens in the moment, like if we hit a roadblock in the planning - that's where teachers come in."



"The biggest thing is having the freedom to decide how to move forward, usually asking for support happens in the moment, like if we hit a roadblock in the planning - that's where teachers come in."

"Making time for students to come together and talk, encouraging us to take the lead is really important – allowing students to make their vision."

"Providing space, using the power that teachers have that students don't to better support them, giving them the freedom to make their own decisions, stuff like that."

? What absolutely must teachers know about organizing with students –

"Give youth the platform, see what it is that they want."

"One thing that they must do is know what it is like to make important decisions. Not everything that we say and do is finalized but we should be a part of making decisions and knowing what it's like to be an adult."

"Being encouraging – stepping back and youth step up."

"Most of all, be collaborative."

? How would you like to be involved in adult organizing –



"Assemblies, time taken out to discuss student organizing, help planning walkouts, some teachers plan events for social issues, even the curriculum."

"The curriculum part, adults can ask what we want to see, students could even be building it, teachers could ask classes what they want the curriculum to look like."

"Getting more student opinion about what students want to be learning and what teachers are teaching."

"Even being in some of the meetings, maybe like a representative democracy even that students vote on a student rep to sit in meetings, teachers have meetings multiple times a day, and I don't know what they are allowed to discuss especially with Transformative Justice or Restorative Justice, but getting students more involved in the planning stage."

? How should teachers sustain restorative schools that make organizing possible –

"It would be dope to have more time during the day for staff to connect more with students. If we want the teacher-student connection, we first need to develop the connections and the relationships with each other. From there, then we can move into more restorative practices."

"Sit in circle. When correcting a teacher who might say something that doesn't really align with values, like you've got to take accountability as a teacher. I think really it's important to shift the room... we've got to sit in circles and move the room around a bit. A circle allows for more confidentiality and allows for us to see each other and share more with each other."





"Add Restorative Justice to staff training. One thing our school does well is that we're always open to new ideas. We already have new ways of RJ practices."

"Creating more inclusive spaces. I think people forget how an inclusive environment makes people feel. Having more of these inclusive things makes people feel safe. People feel empowered."





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GET INVOLVED

<u>Beginning this April</u>, teachers, students, and parents from public schools across NYC will gather to share, learn, and plan school-site organizing strategies to shift practices and culture away from policing and towards Restorative Justice. If you're eager to organize for change in your school, these meetings are for you!

How Will We Get Started?

As you've read, we've already collected advice and strategies from school communities who have worked together to make changes in their own schools.

In monthly cohort meetings, we will come together to share and learn these tactics, develop and execute organizing strategies at our own schools, and get support from others doing the same.

What Do Cohort Meetings Look Like?

Come to the cohort where your school is. Once a month, three separate borough-based cohorts will meet in (1) Brooklyn, (2) Uptown/Bronx, and (3) Downtown. Queens and Staten Island cohorts to come.

Cohort meetings are led by and open to public school students, educators, and parents. Whether you bring a group from your school or are looking for help talking with others, cohort meetings are designed to help you where you're at.

What Is Our End Goal?

Organizing and building power at the school level is crucial to transforming NYC public schools. By building a broad network of educators, students, and parents who are organizing at their schools, we will make school safer and more supportive for thousands of young people and build the conditions needed to win restorative, police-free schools citywide.

Questions? <u>Send us a note</u>.





We are grateful to be in community with those who shared the first hand stories, tactics, advice, art, and creativity that fill the pages of this Toolkit –

Sean Abbott-Klafter, Ronnie Almonte, Lauren Clavin, Ryan Clayton, E.M. Eisen-Markowitz, Rosie Frascella, David Garcia-Rosen, Shemrod Isaac, Alex Jallot, Herm Jerome, Jia Lee, Sally Lee, Noelle Mapes, Kevin Mears, mbathio m, Alex Mojica, Dana Nelson, Ness, Nico, Nickyy, Nømad, Obad, Taeko Onishi, Katherine Peterson, Barry Price, Nicole Riley, Sam Rubin, Malcolm Sacks, Eli Schrerer, Toni Smith-Thompson, Joel Solow, Mike Stivers, Lilit Suffet, Rebecca del Toro, Martin Urbach

Thank you to those who helped build out this project from the very beginning, through setting our goals, showing up for planning meetings, scheduling and facilitating interviews, and taking hundreds of pages of rigorous notes –

Ujju Aggarwal, Diana Azizova, Lauren Clavin, Ryan Clayton, Alex Crisafi, Caitlin Delphin, Sigrid Dolan, Carolyn Eanes, Natalia Foreman, Jossina Gyasi, Jennifer Hadlock, Greg Halzen, Nicole Hamilton, Meg Jones, Mihret Maxwell, Mbathio Mbaye, Valeria Mogilevich, Meril Mousoom, Talia Sandwick, Samyra Tavares, Nico Verene

Thank you to the team who worked together to draft and shape this document, getting it over the finish line –

Godson Ansah, Madeline Borrelli, Jennifer Finn, Chris Frias, Sanjidah Jahan, Gabriella Mucilli, Ilona Nanay, Brandon Nguyen, Charlotte Pope, Clad Sanon, Bella Week

